

# Young Klondike

## STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

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### YOUNG KLONDIKE'S MASTODON MINE; OR THE BIGGEST STRIKE OF ALL.

By AUTHOR OF "YOUNG KLONDIKE."



"Yes, it is gold," said Young Klondike, picking up the nugget which was all he could easily lift. "It is gold—pure gold." "Indians! Indians!" was shouted at the same moment. There was the Unknown running toward the frozen mastodon wildly waving his hand.

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## Young Klondike's Mastodon Mine; — OR — THE BIGGEST STRIKE OF ALL.

BY AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### OFF FOR MASTODON CREEK.

"Hooray for Young Klondike!"

"Hooray for the boss!"

"Good-by!"

"Good luck!"

"Come back to us soon!"

These and many similar cries rang out as the dog moved away from Death Creek.

"Good-by, boys! Good-by!" was shouted back,

as the dogs trotted off upon the frozen Klondike,

and up the river, and were soon lost to view around

the projecting bluff which jutted far out into the

river.

"Don't like the look of the sky, not for a cent,"

cried old Silas Rigby, the superintendent of the

Death Creek mine, as he turned back toward the

mining-house. "I'd like to bet a sixpence it's go-

ing to snow."

Everybody seemed very anxious to take the old man

at his word, for from a season of intense cold—

below zero, in fact—it had suddenly grown

warmer, and there was a chilliness to the air which

was really more unpleasant than it had been while

the cold lasted.

It was very evident that it was going to snow.

"It's a bad job if they get caught in the storm," re-

sponded the old man to one of the miners. "I'm

afraid they won't have time to put it through to

Death Creek before it comes on, either, but there

is no use in talking to them; Young Klondike

is a good fellow; no power on earth can stop him once his

mind is made up."

Having given utterance to this opinion, old Silas

went into the shaft house and began the busi-

ness of the day.

There were two of the dog sleds, both large, com-

fortable affairs, drawn by six well-trained dogs each.

In the first rode Ned Golden, otherwise known as "Young Klondike," and his partner, Dick Luckey, of the now famous mining firm of Golden & Luckey.

But a comparatively short time before these two young men had been poor clerks in New York City, whereas now, such had been their success at mining on the Klondike, they had become the king pins of the great Alaskan gold fields, so to speak.

On the next sled rode a little man and a bright, sweet-faced young girl.

The latter was Miss Edith Welton, a young lady whom Ned Golden had saved from a wrecked steamer on the way north from Seattle, when he first came to the Klondike. At the time, Edith had been on her way to Dawson City in search of her father, an old Californian miner, but failing to find him, this smart little business woman—and Edith was all of that—had cast her fortunes with the firm of Golden & Luckey, of which she was a member. Fortune had favored their mining operations, and now Edith was as rich as her partners, and that even for the Klondike, was saying a good deal, for Golden & Luckey were worth millions, as everybody knew.

The little man who drove the second dog team was the famous Unknown, recognizable from the tall hat which he persisted in wearing, in spite of its entire inappropriateness to the climate.

This singular individual professed to be a detective. He had been associated with Golden & Luckey in all their undertakings, and yet they knew no more of him than the fact that he claimed to be in the Klondike country searching for some mysterious criminal, whom he always styled his man.

As to who this man was and what crime he had committed, Young Klondike knew nothing, and



stranger still, they did not even know the name of their friend, for the Unknown would never divulge the secret—hence he remained the Unknown.

"What do you think, Ned? Are we going to be able to make Mastodon Creek before the storm catches us?" asked Dick, as the sled flew on over the ice.

"If I didn't think so I shouldn't have tried it," replied Young Klondike, giving the leaders a cut with the whip. "We ought to be able to run up Mastodon Creek about an hour after sunset if we can keep it up the way we've started in."

The sun had not yet risen; it would have been dark but for the stars, which shone with true Arctic brilliancy. The winter day in the Klondike country is a short one; two o'clock would see the sun down again and it would be necessary to make the most of the daylight, for it would not be all plain sailing for the sleds; there were places where the ice was rough and uneven and great hummocks had formed. It was Young Klondike's hope to get beyond this danger spot before night overtook them, for, in common with everyone else, he believed in the coming storm.

The wind was right, and the sudden rise of temperature was almost a sure sign.

And yet no one not familiar with the climate would have looked for a storm with that brilliant star display overhead.

But it was surely coming, and before the sun rose the sky was overclouded and the stars vanished. Dawn brought a dull, leaden sky, with every appearance of snow.

On they flew, passing Barney McGraw's mine and the mouth of Bonanza creek, as well as the old abandoned claim where Golden & Luckey made their start when they first came to Klondike—"Weltonville," they called it in honor of Edith. It made all hands feel rather melancholy to see the abandoned buildings half buried in snow, but this mine, although rich at the start, had soon "petered out," as the saying is, and since the days of their Weltonville speculation Golden & Luckey had opened up many successful claims.

Now they were off for a new venture—they were always trying something new.

And yet the Mastodon Creek mine was an old one, too. It had originally been started by Mr. McCullagh, the president of the Dawson City Mining Exchange; proving difficult and expensive to work in the winter, Mr. McCullagh decided to close the mine until spring, and a short time before the opening of our story he had traded with Young Klondike, giving him the extension to the Mastodon Creek property in exchange for the extension to Young Klondike's claim on Death Creek, the highly successful mine which our friends had just now left.

Of course, anyone else would have postponed the opening of this new property until spring, but Golden & Luckey were not that sort.

They worked in winter as well as in summer, and now they were on their way to their new claim to do

a little prospecting and see what sort of a prospect it was likely to prove.

"Not that I have overmuch faith in it," replied Ned to Dick, as they rode along over the ice. Cullagh did not strike anything so wonderful on Mastodon Creek, and I suppose we have to expect it; but at the same time we want to know what sort of a claim it is. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if we had a richer claim than we think there."

"Well," replied Dick, "and that's just what I'm thinking, for between ourselves, Ned, although it may sound rather egotistical to say it, we know a thing or two about prospecting these gold fields that others do not know, and I have an idea that we are going to strike it rich here in Mastodon Creek."

The short day wore on, and darkness was upon our travelers, when true to the prognostication of Silas Rigby, it began to snow.

There was nothing for it now but to put it to the creek, or else go into camp in the woods.

Ned urged his dogs on faster, at the same time urging the Unknown to make the best time he could.

"There isn't more than an hour's run ahead of us," he called, "and I don't think it will snow hard for awhile yet, the way it is coming down."

Ned was right, and during that hour they were making good time over the ice.

Mastodon Creek now lay very near them, but the trouble was it had grown so dark that there was danger of passing the place where they had to turn down a narrow gorge, through which the creek flowed to the Klondike.

To miss this point would be sure to bring no small trouble, and might mean death, for that section of the Klondike was but little opened, and there was no mining camp nearer than several miles. At Mastodon Creek there were the mining buildings erected by Mr. McCullagh, and they were sure of shelter if they could reach the place.

"We must be almost there now," remarked Ned, peering anxiously ahead. "Don't you think we'd better turn in closer to the shore?"

"Just what I'm about to do," replied Ned, giving his lines a pull. "I think myself that we are upon the place, but it is so thundering dark that we can't make out a thing."

"It is snowing harder, is it not?"

"Seems so to me; it's thick enough, anyhow."

"Hello! Hello!" shouted the Unknown from the other sled.

"Hello!" answered Dick, making a speck of trumpet of his hands.

"We are going too far!" roared the Unknown.

"Ned don't think so!" bawled Dick.

"I'm sure of it!" was the shout which came back. "We want to go in toward shore."

"Here we go!" cried Ned. "We'll soon see if it is right. I'm certain that this is the place."

Young Klondike judged by the formation of the mountain and the way they came down to the



—about all there was to judge by in that uncertain light.

Still this was very deceptive, as the mountains looked much alike even in daylight.

Soon they were close to the shore, but no break was visible in the mountains. For more than a mile they kept on without coming to the creek.

It was getting to be a very serious matter. Faster and faster the snow was falling, and the dogs were beginning to show decided signs of fatigue.

Here was another danger.

If one of the dogs took it into his head to lie down the others would be pretty certain to follow his example.

The fact of the matter was, they had gone as far as it was safe to go, and yet it was more dangerous still to stop.

Just as matters reached this critical pass, all hands were startled by the loud blowing of a horn.

It seemed to come directly from the mountains ahead of them, and yet after all, this might be only the result of the echo; it was not easy to say just where the sound did come from under the circumstances.

It might mean another dog team stuck in the snow, or it might be that some mining camp had been started up here in this desolate region, and that some of the miners were out on the ice and their friends were trying to guide them back.

"We'll follow the horn!" cried Ned; "there's some one near us, that's certain!"

They kept on for a little, the horn sounding at intervals.

All at once they came upon the mouth of a narrow gorge leading back among the foothills.

"Hooray! Here's the place! Mastodon Creek at last!" shouted Ned.

Just then the horn was blown again and immediately following the sound, a wild cry rang out upon the storm.

There was no mistaking it; there could not be the least doubt that the cry came from some one in serious trouble.

It seemed to proceed from the gorge, and to Young Klondike it seemed plain enough that it came from some one lost in the storm.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MYSTERIOUS HUT.

"Is it Mastodon Creek, Ned? Do you feel sure that we are making no mistake?"

It was Edith who put the question.

Young Klondike had pulled in the dogs and stopped for the other team to come up. It would not do at all to become separated in the storm.

"I don't think there can be any doubt about its being the creek," replied Ned. "At all events it is some creek, and with all that horn blowing there ought to be shelter near."

"You'll find that there is," said the detective. "We want to keep right on up the gorge. Hark! There goes the cry again! It puzzles me to know what that can mean."

There were to be other puzzling things before the night had passed, as Young Klondike and his friends were soon to learn.

None of them had ever visited the Mastodon Creek diggings, and they really knew nothing about the lay of the land here, but this was scarcely necessary, since all they could do was to follow along up the gorge.

They had not advanced far, when a turn in the gorge brought them in sight of a cluster of rough frame buildings, which dispelled all doubt. They had reached the McCullagh claim, for the situation of the buildings and their number were just such as had been described to them.

Now, strangely enough, the horn was silent, and when they strained their ears to catch the cry again, it did not come.

Ned drove the dog team in under a covered shed, which extended away from the hut, and gave a loud hello, but the call was not answered. The silence of the grave seemed to hang over the deserted camp, deserted sure enough it proved to be.

Dick was the first to enter the hut, and he hastened to light the lantern and flash it around.

"No one here!" he called. "Perhaps somebody can explain the mystery of all that horn blowing, but I'll be hanged if I can! This place seems to be deserted for fair."

"We won't try just yet awhile," replied the Unknown, coming in at that moment. "It may be that there is another camp near here. How about that, Ned?"

"Don't know," called Ned, who was busy unharnessing the dogs with Edith's help.

Edith was very fond of the dogs and liked to work over them. In the sled was plenty of dried tundra grass for bedding, and as they carried their provisions with them the dogs were soon feeding, and everything made comfortable for them for the night.

When Ned and Edith came into the hut they found a crackling fire blazing on the hearth, and everything as snug as circumstances would permit.

"This is all right," said the Unknown, "we've got through our journey safely, and for my part I could put in as comfortable a night here as I ever spent in my life, if it wasn't for the feeling that there must be somebody near us who needs help."

"That's just what's the matter," replied Young Klondike. "What are we going to do about it? I don't feel much like settling down here for the night, with some suffering fellow creature near."

"Yet, what are we to do?" asked Dick. "The horn has stopped blowing, and we don't hear the cry any more. I don't see that there is anything to be done, unless—hello! Here's a horn now! Perhaps we can start them up again. This is just the thing."



Hanging up in the corner near the chimney, was a tin horn which Dick immediately appropriated.

"You stay here and get dinner ready, Edith," said Ned. "We'll go out and prowling round a bit, blow the horn a few times, and see what we can strike."

As they opened the door, a gust of wind blew the snow into the hut, and Ned made haste to close it again.

"We positively can't go far," he said. "It would be risking our lives on such a night."

"Toot your horn, Dick! Toot your horn!" cried the Unknown, his words almost blown away by the wind.

Dick put the horn to his lips and blew a loud blast, which echoed and reechoed among the hills.

A moment more and the answer came.

The sound proceeded from up the gorge—there was no mistake about it.

Ned flashed the lantern before them, and they hurried on through the snow.

Then came the cry and Dick shouted in answer, blowing the horn again.

Turning a bend in the gorge a moment later they caught sight of a bright light up on the side of the hill.

"Another hut!" cried Ned. "Don't you see!"

"I'll be hanged if it isn't!" said the Unknown. "Look! Look! There are men up there!"

Several dark forms could be seen moving around before the door of a small hut on the side of the hill.

Dick shouted to them and the shouts were answered.

At the same instant a fearful gust of wind swept down the gorge.

It was so violent that all turned their backs to break the force of it.

As they did so the cry rang out again, seemingly from many voices.

The gust passed by and all three turned around and looked up on the hill.

All was dark now.

The light had vanished. If the hut was there they could not see it.

Dick blew the horn again and again, and Ned and the Unknown shouted, but there was no response. All was as still as death where they had seen the hut, and look as they would there was nothing visible but the driving snow.

"We must get up there," declared Ned. "Something has happened to those poor fellows, although I'm sure I can't imagine what it could have been to change things so all in a moment."

"But can we get up there?" questioned the Unknown. "Is it possible without risking our lives?"

"At all events we can try," declared Ned. "Let's go along a little further and see what we strike."

They pushed on and soon had the satisfaction of coming to a place where there was an easy ascent to the place where they had seen the hut.

Here the snow was pretty deep and it grew deeper and deeper as they advanced, but they wallowed

through it, coming at last to a point very near where they judged the hut must have been seen.

Ned flashed the lantern ahead, but could see nothing but snow.

Pushing on a few steps further they sank so deep in the drift that they grew alarmed. To keep on was clearly impossible. There seemed to be perfect mountains of snow here.

"We've got to give it up. There's no hut here!" gasped the Unknown.

"I don't see how there can be," said Ned, deeply puzzled. "And yet this is just the place where we saw it—that's sure."

"Do you know I think we have passed the place," declared Dick. "There is something very mysterious in all this."

It was indeed so. If only one had seen the hut it would be easy to imagine that it might be nothing but an ocular delusion, but all had seen it and, besides, there had been the cry and the blowing of the horn.

But the mystery was not to be solved that night.

After blowing the horn again several times, and shouting until they were hoarse, they gave it up and returned to Edith, who was as much puzzled as anyone at the strange occurrence.

It was a long time before they could quiet down for the night.

Again and again Young Klondike went out and blew the horn, but no answer came.

At last they turned in, and the night passed away quietly, taking the storm with it.

At six o'clock, when Ned arose and went out again, the stars were shining most brilliantly, and the moon was out in all her glory.

Young Klondike waded through the snow up the gorge until he reached the point from which they had seen the mysterious hut on the hill.

There was no hut visible. Up there on the hillside like everywhere else, the snow lay deep and not the first trace of the hut was to be seen.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MYSTERY OF THE FROZEN MAN.

"I THINK we must have all been dreaming," declared the Unknown when they sat down to breakfast a little later. "There's no hut there and never could have been, that's one of the sure things; the snow is banked up on the hill there twenty feet deep."

The Unknown and Dick had just returned from another trip up the hill, an expedition which resulted in nothing, but this remark about the snow gave Ned an idea.

"Look here, do you know what I think?" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"No, I'm sure I don't," replied the Unknown.



"You may think any old thing, but as I don't happen to be a mind-reader I can't tell what it is."

"What lies above that place up there on the hill? Why should there be so much more snow there than anywhere else?"

"I'll be blest if I can tell you, but there is, all the same. There are rocks above, I suppose, but they are all covered with snow, too."

"I believe there was a landslide and the hut was buried. No one can ever talk me out of what I actually saw."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, that is an idea!" cried the Unknown. "That means a lot of dead men under the snow!"

Edith shuddered.

"Oh, the poor things!" she exclaimed. "How terrible if it should be so! Something must be done at once to find out if Ned is right."

"But what can we do?" asked Ned. "Clearly nothing! If those men are there, they are dead, of course, and if we were to undertake to dig them out we wouldn't be able to do it in a week. There's a fearful lot of snow up there, Edith; you would have to see it to understand."

"Still it seems too terrible to leave them there, and we not even know who they are."

"If we did know it would not do them any good nor us, either; but we'll wait till daylight before we explore the gorge, and then first of all we'll go up there on the hill again."

This plan, however, was not carried out, for when daylight came the Unknown, who was prowling around outside, made another discovery which was by no means pleasant.

"Come here, Ned!" he called, as Young Klondike opened the door of the hut. "Come here, quick!"

"Now the Unknown was over on the other side of the gorge where a perpendicular wall of rock rose to a height of several hundred feet.

He was bending down and examining something in the snow.

"What have you struck?" called Ned.

"Indians," replied the detective. "Ye gods and little fishes, it's Indians sure!"

"Where are they? I don't see your Indians. You can't scare me," replied Ned.

"Well, now, just you look at this trail. There, what do you make of that?"

The Unknown pointed down upon the snow, where, sure enough, there were the imprints of many feet; whoever it was that had made the footprints, they seemed to have gone up the gorge.

"Are you sure it's Indians?" asked Ned. "Can you be certain of that?"

"Look for yourself."

"Oh, I see the trail, all right, but how do you know it was made by Indians?"

"Do I know the print of a moccasined foot when I see one, or don't I?"

But this was not final, by any means, for in the

Klondike country many miners have adopted the Indian moccasin.

The only certain thing about the discovery was, that some party had been prowling around the hut in the early morning while Young Klondike's party slept.

This was not a pleasant thought by any means.

It worried Ned not a little.

He regretted now that he had not asked Mr. McCullagh for a detailed account of the Mastodon mine property, but the fact was the deal had been made in such haste that he had never thought of it.

The same with his determination to visit the property. Young Klondike had come to the conclusion suddenly and there had been no time to go to Dawson City, look up Mr. McCullagh and get a map or chart of the place.

But Young Klondike was not of the kind to scare easily, and his companions were just the same.

The Unknown was sure that the trail had been made by Indians, and the rest were in doubt.

It ended in the way these discussions usually ended, by the detective starting off on his own hook to explore.

"If you'll let me out, Young Klondike, I'll pile ahead of the gorge," he said. "I'll bet you a dollar and a half I locate these people whoever they are. By the time you get ready to start I shall be back."

Ned knew that it was no use to think of stopping the detective, and so let him go on his way rejoicing, while he and Dick made their preparations for a location at the Mastodon mine.

It was decided to use the hut for the present, as it was within half a mile of the extension to the claim which was now the property of Golden & Luckey.

So the first thing to do was to unpack the goods, arrange for firewood and water, and to make a place where the dogs could remain comfortably for a few days.

These and other things absolutely necessary for such work as they now proposed to engage in had to be done before it would be safe to start in to explore their claim.

It was eleven o'clock before they were through with it all, and the Unknown had not returned.

Now if it had been anyone else the boys might have felt worried, but they knew the detective's habits too well to feel much anxiety on his account.

"You'd better bring in a few pails more water before we start, Dick," said Ned, who was busy packing a knapsack with provisions enough to last for forty-eight hours, without which they made it a rule never to start away. "We shall need it when we get back, and I'm sure none of us will want to be cutting ice and lugging water then."

"That's what's the matter," said Dick. "I'll go right along."

They had cut a hole in the ice over the frozen creek and brought in water for the dogs a short time before, and Dick now took two pails and went to the place for more.



He had just filled the second bucket when shots were heard up on the heights on the other side of the creek, coming apparently from some distance away.

This was startling. Ned and Edith came running out of the hut to find out what the matter was, but Dick could not tell them.

Four shots were fired altogether, and then all was still.

"That means the Unknown, I'll bet a hat," declared Ned. "We want to start right on now."

It certainly was alarming, and it made them all feel that it was rather unsafe to leave the dogs and their goods behind them, but this was something which could not be helped.

"Strange we don't see anybody up there," remarked Dick, who kept his eyes fixed upon the rocks as they pushed on through the snow up the gorge.

"I don't know as it is," replied Edith. "It may only have been the Unknown firing at rabbits, or perhaps a moose. Because we heard the shots it don't follow that there are Indians around."

"Of course not," said Ned. "There are a dozen ways of explaining the shots, but still, taken in connection with the footprints, it looks as though they meant more than rabbits or moose."

"How far is it to the beginning of our claim?" asked Dick. "What mark do we go by?"

"Why, Mr. McCullagh staked out two thousand feet on the creek for his claim, and we are to have the next two thousand," replied Ned. "The mark is a crooked fir tree on the right side of the gorge."

"There are dozens of fir trees here, that's rather indefinite."

"Yes, but this one is so crooked that it forms a regular letter S. It is very marked, Mr. McCullagh said; he assured me that we couldn't mistake it."

"We ought to be pretty near it now," said Edith, "but after we leave this crooked tree how far does our line run?"

"Two thousand feet more up the gorge."

"And beyond that?"

"Oh, beyond that Mr. McCullagh owns for a mile."

"Pity we didn't take that, too, while we were about it," remarked Dick. "I suppose we could have got it for little or nothing."

Ned laughed. "Why, I didn't forget that," he said. "I took the refusal of the balance of the claim for ninety days; didn't I tell you, Dick?"

"No; you never mentioned it."

"Well, that was an oversight. If we find anything rich on our two thousand feet we can take up with the rest any time within the next sixty days; you know it's just thirty days since we signed the papers on this Mastodon Creek deal."

"There's your crooked tree, boys!" cried Edith, suddenly, pointing at the same time up to the rocks on their right. "Push on! In a moment we shall be on our own land; I'm mighty curious to see what this claim looks like anyhow. It strikes me it's going to be hard work mining under this snow."

There was no mistaking the tree. It was certainly a prominent landmark, and what was more, its distance from the hut was just about two thousand feet.

The gorge now began turning and they passed through several windings which made it hard to calculate the distance.

All at once they passed in under a great projecting ledge which had so sheltered the place from the storm that the ground was bare for quite a distance; beyond this there was a little snow, and stretched out upon it Ned perceived a man.

"Look! Look!" cried Dick at the same instant. "See that man on the ground there! Can it be the Unknown?"

"Never!" said Edith. "Too big for Zed. Don't suggest it!"

"It never is," added Ned. "Say, Dick, there's been mining done there. See where the earth has been piled up? See the brushwood heap? Some one has been prospecting our claim."

As they pushed forward all eyes were fixed upon the man, of course.

He did not move. Ned was sure that he was dead, and he was just about to say so when Dick stopped short with an exclamation of astonishment, and no wonder, for right ahead of them, just behind the prostrate man, was a strange sight.

Here, owing to a break in the rocky wall which enabled the water to trickle down from the heights above, an immense quantity of ice had formed, completely filling a deep indentation in the rock.

Such ice holes as these are common in the Klondike country. In them the ice never fully melts, but sometimes great masses of it breaks away and fall of their own weight.

Just such a thing had happened here and that quite recently, to all appearances, for the broken pieces of ice lay scattered about on the snow.

But the breaking away of the ice had revealed a wonderful sight.

There, embedded in the icy wall, stood the skeleton remains of a mastodon; one of those strange prehistoric elephants with curved tusks, which are frequently found in Alaska, as well as other parts of the Arctic regions.

The skeleton was perfect, as far as could be seen.

In some mysterious way the animal had perished in there between the rocks, and the ice had formed around him ages before, now to be exposed by the break which had occurred no one can tell how.

"A fossil mastodon frozen in the ice!" cried Ned. "That thing would be worth a fortune if we could get it out and send it to the States."

"It's ours—it's on our own land!" exclaimed Edith. "But that man—we mustn't forget him! How still he lies! Ned, I fear the worst!"

"You think he is frozen, and I'm sure of it," said Ned, quietly. "Yes, Edith, we have to deal with death here. I felt it from the first."

A few steps further brought them to the spot, and Ned's worst fears were realized.



he man, a rough-looking fellow dressed in the al style of a Klondike prospector, was quite dead, ten stiff at the foot of the skeleton of that giant st, which had met with a similar fate ages upon s before.

here was something awe-inspiring in the sight. man lay on his back with his face turned up- rd, cold and still, and as white as marble.

he projecting ledges above the mastodon had pro- ed him from the snow, and it had also left uncov- l a prospect hole almost between the legs of the stodon; there were mining tools scattered about, the heap of gravel removed from the hole, while ost within reach of the man's hand lay a great s of stuff, part quartz rock, part yellow clay, with usands of minute yellowish points bristling out all r it.

nother might not have given it a thought, but ng Klondike's practiced eye detected its true racter at a glance, and Dick and Edith saw it,

A nugget!" cried Dick. "A big nugget as sure ate."

Dick had looked up the gorge just then, he would e seen something which might have interested quite as much as the nugget.

was a little man with a tall hat tilted on the back is head, running toward them as fast as his legs d carry him.

Yes, it is gold," said Young Klondike, picking up nugget, which was all he could easily lift. "It is t—pure gold!"

ndians! Indians!" was shouted at the same mo- t.

here was the Unknown running toward the frozen todon, wildly waving his hand.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WORKING A DEAD MAN'S MINE.

F course the sudden appearance of the detective a his startling announcement threw everyone into ate of excitement.

ed and Dick grasped their rifles, and Edith, who ed decidedly the best shot of the three, unslung hers made ready for business at once.

Where are your Indians?" demanded Ned, as the nown came up all breathless.

Right up the gorge, and don't you forget it! By Jumping Jeremiah, there's half a dozen of them!" the excited reply.

That means business for us," replied Ned, "but n't scare worth a cent! What are they—Copper- es?"

That's just what they are, and the very worst ans we have to deal with, as you very well know," ed the detective. "They are armed with rifles,

Didn't you hear them firing at me? Ye gods little fishes, I thought I was a goner then!"

Never mind what happened then—tell us what to

do now," said Dick. "We can't retreat, I suppose. We've got to do our fighting here."

"Yes, we can retreat, too."

"Where?"

"Up on the mastodon."

"Thunder! How?"

"Why, there's room enough between the ribs and the ice to lodge us all right, and the bones are almost big enough to hide us. I say let's go up there."

"Can we climb up?" queried Ned. "I like the sug- gestion if we can."

"We can try," said the detective, with his usual energy. "I thought likely I should meet you here. Strange about this poor fellow, is it not? I wonder who he can be?"

There was no time to speculate on the dead man then, and Ned never even stopped to answer, but be- gan to climb up the mastodon's leg.

It was easy enough for him to reach the ribs, and with Dick's help below and Ned's above, Edith man- aged to get up.

Dick and the Unknown speedily followed.

"Not very secure, I must say," declared Young Klondike. "If the Indians take it into their heads to look up, as they probably will, I don't see how they can fail to see us; perhaps after all it would have been safer to have retreated to the hut."

"I don't think so," replied the Unknown. "In the first place we never could have reached it with- out being seen, and besides that it would only have meant a siege in the hut, which would have ended in certain capture."

"And now," said Dick, "it will end in all our things being stolen, and like enough the dogs along with the rest. A bad job; almost enough to make us think seriously of killing those fellows if we get the chance."

But although Dick said this he did not mean it.

Young Klondike's party were not the kind to do killing, even of Indians, unless it was a matter of life and death.

"Where did you first strike them?" Ned asked, as they sat there waiting for the Indians to appear.

"Why, I followed the trail until I came to this place," replied the detective, "naturally I stopped to have a look at the mastodon and the dead man and all the rest."

"See the big nugget?"

"No; I saw no nugget."

"Look down there—see, there it lies."

"Thunder! Is that a nugget?"

"Yes, it is, and a mighty rich one, too."

"That dirty brown thing? It's hard to believe it."

"It's a nugget, fast enough; but about the In- dians?"

"Well, I went on up the gorge, and finding the snow pretty deep I was just about to turn back when I saw that the trail went up on the rocks."

"And you followed it?"

"Oh, yes, followed it up to a big plain or table- land above here where the woods are thick. There I



lost it among the trees, and I was just thinking about giving it up and returning when I got the shots."

"From the Indians?"

"Must have been from the Indians, although I didn't see them then."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I climbed a tree. Don't believe they fired at me, for what did they do but come and camp within a dozen yards of that very tree. Here they built a fire, skinned a pair of rabbits and were cooking them, when I managed to slip out of the tree and came mighty near making my escape without being seen. Didn't quite fetch it, though."

"Oh, they got sight of you, did they?"

"Yes, they did, and they hunted me down the mountain. I managed to give them the slip, and—hush! Here they come now!"

Looking up the gorge all could see a band of six Indians coming along over the snow.

They were so bundled up in skins that it was hard to tell whether they were men or women.

Three were certainly men, for they carried rifles.

In their silent way they moved on looking neither to the right or the left.

When they came up to where the dead man lay they merely glanced at him, and never looked up at the mastodon at all.

Indeed it was quite evident from their actions that they were familiar with the place.

They shuffled on through the snow, turned the bend of the gorge and were gone.

For fully fifteen minutes our friends remained in their hiding place up among the mastodon's ribs, waiting to see if this quiet departure of the Indians was merely a ruse to lure them down.

At last the Unknown ventured to descend, and after going around the bend in the gorge he soon came back again and assured them that the Indians were not in sight, and all hands climbed out of the skeleton, breathing freely for the first time since the alarm.

"What's to be done now?" asked Dick. "I suppose the hut has been cleaned out by this time?"

"Don't you fret. I'll soon prove that," said the detective. "We've had a lucky escape; just you go on with whatever you meant to do and I'll prowl back to the hut and see what the reds are about."

"If you don't mind that will just suit me," said Ned. "While we are here I'd like to know what this dead man's mine amounts to, seeing that it is located on our claim."

"I'll do it," said the detective. "Show me the nugget. What, that thing? By the Jumping Jeremiah, I never even gave it a thought! Well, well! You are right, sure enough, Young Klondike, it is gold."

"Gold! I should say so! I wouldn't wonder a bit if that lump panned out ten thousand dollars. It's as rich a specimen as ever I saw."

"And the poor fellow died just as he found it," remarked Edith. "Isn't it sad!"

"I wonder if he can be the man we heard call for help last night?" mused Dick, "or has he been too long dead for that?"

"I think he has been dead at least twenty-hours," replied the detective.

"Why do you say so?"

"Oh, I judge from his appearance; still I would be sure. I suppose now you'd like to know who is?"

"Well, of course it would interest me," said Dick. "What if we go through his pockets? I was going to suggest it when you came along and gave us that Indian scare."

"We'll do it now," said Ned. "I kind of hate to do it, though."

"Well, if you hate to do it, you needn't do it," said the Unknown, "for it wouldn't be the least use."

"No! You have done it already I take it."

"That's what I have. Some one has been through that poor fellow before we ever saw him; that's what I say I think he must have been dead at least twenty-four hours. My idea is that he died before the storm began."

"Probably got caught in the cold snap night before last," said Ned. "Well, we can't help him, but we want to have a look at this mine, and don't like looking at him, so I propose we bury the poor wretch right now."

"That means in the snow," said Edith.

"In the snow, of course."

"That seems rather hard, too."

"The ground is harder—it would be a tough job to dig him a grave."

"Ned! It's no subject to joke about," said Edith indignantly. "Just think of what the poor man has suffered!"

"I'm not joking; you mustn't mind my lightness of speaking, Edith. You know very well if there were any earthly way of helping the poor fellow I'd do it, but he's past that and the only thing we can do is to put him under the snow."

And this was just what they did.

Selecting a place out in the gorge where the snow had drifted deep, Ned and Dick dug a grave and laid the frozen man in and covered him up.

Who he might be was a mystery, and seemed likely to remain one for some time to come.

Meanwhile, the Unknown had followed the trail of the Indians down the gorge, promising to return once when he had anything to report.

"Now, we are free to act!" exclaimed Ned. "Since we can't find out who this fellow is, let's try to find out what he has been doing, for remember this dead man's mine is ours, and we may decide to go right on with the prospect hole."

"I think we may as well consider that decided now," said Dick. "He seems to have got down about fifteen feet."

"Let me down till I have a look," said Ned. "The snow seems to have blown in there just enough



cover things up, but it won't take me long to make it out."

There was a rope with a bucket attached lying near, but no windlass had been built.

As soon as Ned gave his attention to the mine, he saw that there must have been more than one man at work on it.

"How else could he have handled this bucket?" he asked. "It would have been just impossible for him to do it alone."

"Not impossible," said Dick, "but it isn't likely he did it. If he had been alone he would have rigged up a windlass sure."

"Well, let me down and I'll see what there is to be seen," said Ned, and Dick lowered the bucket over the edge of the hole just enough for Ned to have a chance to stand on the edge.

Ned took his place upon it and with the rope bearing over the hole, he was lowered down into the bottom of the shaft.

There was about three inches of snow here. The sides of the shaft were hard frozen and presented the usual appearance. There was no trace of gold to be seen in the gravel, and the hole had not been put down deep enough to reach the black sand deposit, which is found all over the Klondike country.

It is in this black sand that the first traces of gold may be looked for, yet it is often found above the sand and even on the surface, particularly in the beds of creeks.

As Ned reasoned it out this whole gorge had originally been the bed of Mastodon creek, although the stream was now confined to a comparatively narrow space over against the opposite wall.

"See anything?" called Dick.

"Not yet," was the reply; "still he must have got the nugget out of here."

"You may be sure he did. Where else would it have come from?"

"Oh, he might have found it anywhere along the bed of the creek; still, the chances are this was the place. Let down that shovel, Dick. I'll clear away some of the snow."

The shovel came down, and in a few moments Ned had the light covering of snow all banked up in one corner of the shaft.

"Here's the place where the nugget came from!" he called out, "and by Jove! I believe there's another one right below it. The pick and the crowbar—quick, Dick! I must see what this means!"

Dick passed down the pick and the bar.

"I'm going to jump down!" he cried. "I think Edith ought to be able to hold the rope while I climb up again. I'm no heavy weight, you know."

"I'm sure I can manage it," said Edith. "You go right ahead, Dick, and don't you worry."

Dick went down on the rope then, and Edith held it so firmly that there was not a slip.

"How about the nugget, Ned?" he asked, as his feet touched the bottom of the shaft.

"Oh, it's here all right," replied Ned, "but it's wedged in so firm that I can't budge it."

"Let me have a look."

Ned stood aside and showed Dick just such another mass of disintegrated quartz sticking in the bottom of the shaft.

"Gold!"

"Yes; sure."

"If it goes down as far as it projects out of the ground it's a big one."

"My theory is that it goes further."

"And how do you figure that out?"

"I think that the one we found up there was broken off of this."

"Shouldn't wonder a bit—came off right there at that break."

"Yes. We'll soon know. Here, you take the pick and I'll work the bar."

"Is it coming, boys?" called Edith. "How slow you are down there."

"It's coming all right. Just give us a few minutes' time and we'll send you up such a nugget as you never saw."

But in spite of Ned's encouraging speech it was hard work, for the ground around the nugget was frozen solid.

"Oh, if we only dared to light a fire," groaned Dick, picking away for dear life.

"Coming! Coming! Look out!" cried Ned, bearing his weight on the bar.

It came sooner than he thought for.

All at once the bar went down and the nugget flew up.

Ned was sprawling on his back before he knew it.

"We've got him!" cried Dick. "It's bigger than the other! By gracious, this isn't the whole of it, either; there's still another piece embedded in the ground!"

And so there was, and it was all the same class of goods, absolutely bristling with gold.

"This mine is worth working," declared Ned, "but we'll give it up now and go back to meet the Unknown."

Instead of hoisting up the second piece of the nugget, they climbed out of the shaft and rolled the other piece down into it.

"That will keep it out of sight of the Indians, anyhow," declared Ned. "Not that they would be likely to know what it is, still some of them may have been around the mines and they might. At all events it is best to be on the safe side."

It seemed strange that the Unknown had not returned, for he certainly had ample time to do so.

Hurrying back along the trail they soon came in sight of the hut, and at the same time saw the detective walking up and down through the snow at the place where Dick had cut the water hole.

He was looking up at the rocks where the mysterious hut had been seen, and altogether acting in a very odd way.



Dick was going to call out but Ned stopped him, feeling afraid that the Indians might be near.

But his fears were groundless as far as that went, for as soon as the detective caught sight of them he shouted:

"Come here, boys! Come here! By gracious, this is a singular thing."

"What is it? Where are the Indians?" answered Ned, hurrying toward the place.

"I'll be blest if I know where they are. I never caught sight of them afterward. I wasn't talking about that."

"What then? What's the matter with you, anyhow?!"

"Come here! Come here! Let the Indians go to blazes! By the Jumping Jeremiah, this beats the band!"

Evidently the Unknown was highly excited, and the Indians were decidedly at a discount.

"One thing at a time," said Ned, as they came up. "Where are the Indians? Naturally I want to know."

"And naturally I'd tell you if I could, but I don't know myself."

"Have you been to the hut?"

"Yes."

"Is everything all right?"

"Right as the mail. Not a thing disturbed. I don't believe the Indians have been there at all."

"Where in thunder did they go, then? They certainly did not have time to get out of the gorge."

"Ned, it's no use to ask me. I know nothing about the Indians, but I do know something else."

"Let him get it out—let him get it out!" cried Dick. "Don't you see the Unknown has something to say and that he's dying to say it. Do let him speak."

"Well, then," said the detective, "if I may be allowed to speak at last I've seen the mysterious hut on the mountain again."

"No!" they all cried in a breath.

"Oh, yes, I have! No mistake this time."

"Show it to us! Point it out! For Heaven's sake, let us know where it is," Ned exclaimed.

"Just what I can't do, dear boy," replied the detective, looking up at the rocks in a puzzled way. "I saw it, and then it vanished again, but where it went to beats me."

Here was certainly an astonishing statement.

When they came to question the Unknown it appeared that he had gone so far as the hut, and finding everything all right, started to return.

When he had almost reached the water's edge, happening to look up on the rock, he saw the mysterious hut distinctly, but just at that moment a gust of wind came sweeping down the gorge and blew his hat off.

The Unknown turned, picked up his hat and clapped it on his head, and then turned to have another look at the hut, but it had vanished.

He could see it nowhere, and had been trying ever since to get a sight of it.

"You can explain it in whatever way you will, boys," he added, "but as for me, I can't explain it at all. It's the most mysterious thing I ever ran up against since the day I was born."

And, indeed, Mastodon Creek seemed to be all mystery.

Days passed, and nothing was seen or heard of the Indians.

The weather was singularly mild for a Klondike winter, and as all hands went faithfully to work next morning and kept steadily at it, they made good headway on the "dead man's claim," as they came to call the mine under the mastodon.

The prospect hole was cleared out, and by aid of a huge frost fire, kept burning in the bottom for twenty-four hours, they were able to run it down to the black sand level, where gold might naturally be looked for if it was to be found at all.

Meanwhile, another shaft was started further up the gorge by Edith and the Unknown. A frost fire was built here and tended by Edith.

The Unknown did the clearing away of the ashes and as soon as the softened ground was exposed Ned and Dick would quit work in No. 1 and go and dig as far as they could, generally only a foot or so.

Then they would return to their own work, leaving Edith to start a fresh fire and get ready for them again.

During these operations the remainder of the nugget was worked out.

The three pieces fitted perfectly, and as far as Young Klondike could judge the gold value could not have been less than twenty-five thousand dollars.

This, however, was mere guess work based on the weight. No one can tell the value of a big nugget of gold so mixed in with quartz and clay as this was without first removing the worthless parts.

The three pieces of the nugget were packed carefully away in the hut—hidden under the floor, in fact, where they would be safe in case of an attack by Indians or any of the numerous bands of toughs who like to make trouble for lonely prospectors on the Klondike.

So the days passed quietly with plenty to do, plenty to eat and good prospects.

Young Klondike had every reason to hope for great things from his work on the dead man's claim.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MYSTERIOUS HUT FOUND.

"WELL, do you expect to make your big strike to-day, Young Klondike?" asked the Unknown, one morning after they had been thus working away for several days.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Ned. "It's bound to come sooner or later. I have faith in the Mastodon mine."



"How long are we provisioned for?" inquired the detective, rather anxiously, for as it happened, he had paid but little attention to the fitting out of the expedition, and did not know.

"Why, we are good for a month yet," replied Ned. "You need not worry about that at all. Perfectly safe even if a blizzard strikes us."

"Which we may expect almost any time."

"Of course. Shan't worry about it till it comes, though."

"That's right; never borrow trouble. Say, Young Klondike, I've seen the hut again."

"No!"

"Oh, yes, I have. When I went to draw water this morning, I caught sight of it, but as luck would have it I changed my position and it vanished again and after that I couldn't strike it at all."

"What's the position got to do with it?"

"Everything! You can see it in one position, and in another you can't."

"Is that the explanation of it?"

"I'm sure it is; say, am I wanted particularly to-day up at the mines?"

"Well, I don't know as you are; you don't do so much, anyhow."

"Come now, I like that! You're hard on a fellow who works for all he is worth! Haven't I been raking ashes for a week?"

"Oh, never mind that! We can get along without you if you want to make a trip into the mountain. I suppose that's what you are driving at?"

"No, sir. I want to look for the hut."

"Oh, bother the hut!" exclaimed Young Klondike. "I'm tired of thinking about it. Good-by, Zed; I'm going to work."

Thus saying, Ned left the Unknown and hurried off up the gorge after Edith and Dick, who had already gone to the shafts.

"Here's a go!" cried Dick as he approached. "Some one has been here since we left last night."

"You don't mean it!"

"You bet I do."

"Done any damage?"

"Well, they've taken all the tools, that's all, cleaned us out completely."

"The deuce! That's bad! Is everything gone?"

"There isn't a thing left, Ned," called Edith from No. 2 where she was working over her fire which had been smoldering in the hole all night.

This proved to be true enough, and only served to add to the mystery which hung over Mastodon Creek.

Picks, shovels, spades, crowbars, everything had been taken, but the midnight visitors had left no trail behind them. There was now a hard crust on the snow and one could walk about without leaving a mark.

"Look here," said Ned, "this is a bad job, but we must remember one thing."

"What's that?" asked Dick, looking at the shaft with a despondent air, for he had calculated upon doing good work that morning, and now time would

have to be spent bringing up more tools from the hut.

"The tools were not ours," replied Ned.

"Exactly so. That makes it all the worse."

"How all the worse?"

"Why, Ned, it proves that there are people hanging around us still, watching every move we make. You may like that but I don't. That it makes me nervous I can't deny."

"Probably it was the Indians," said Edith, throwing a fresh armful of brushwood upon the fire. "Why don't you go down to the hut and bring up our iron tools, boys, and stop this everlasting talk?"

"It wasn't Indians!" said Dick, shaking his head emphatically. "There are people watching us—I know it! Wait and see."

After some further talk, it was decided to go to the hut for the tools at once.

Edith would have remained at the fire, but the boys would not hear to it, so they all started down the gorge together, and as they walked on, Ned told about the Unknown, and how he claimed to have seen the mysterious hut again.

"Well," said Dick, "you may laugh at the hut, Ned, and think it a waste of time to talk any more about it, but I tell you it ought to be looked into. The Unknown is quite right."

When Dick made this remark they were close to that part of the creek where the water hole had been cut. All at once the shrill blast of a horn was heard up on the rocks to the right.

"The horn again!" cried Dick. "This must be looked into at once."

"Hello! Hello, Young Klondike! Hello, Dick! Hello, Edith! Hello, everybody!" a loud voice cried.

"It's the Unknown!" Edith exclaimed.

Surely it was the detective's voice, but where was he?

Up on the rocks the snow was piled the same as ever, but they could see nothing of the Unknown, look where they would.

"Hello, there! Hello!" shouted Dick. "Where are you, anyhow? Show yourself up there, old man."

"I'm in the mysterious hut!" answered the voice. "Can't you see me?"

"No!"

"Move a little to the left."

Dick did so.

"I can't see you any more than I could before!" he called out.

"Move a little more to the left. Keep moving inch by inch!"

Dick did so and all at once exclaimed that he could see the hut and that the Unknown was standing at the door.

"Hooray!" cried Ned. "The mystery is explained at last; but where is your hut, Dick. I can't see it at all."

"Look where my finger points."

"Nothing but snow there."



"Exactly; now stand right behind me, and look over my shoulder."

"Great Scott! I can see it plain enough now!"

"Hooray!" shouted the Unknown's voice. "Come up here, boys! More mystery, but I've found the hut all right."

One mystery was explained at all events.

When Ned looked over Dick's shoulder he could see the hut, with the detective standing in the doorway waving his plug hat.

If he moved an inch to the right or the left he could not see it, and this for the reason that the hut stood back in a narrow rift on the rock, into which the snow had so drifted that the wonder was one could see the hut at all.

On that first night when the door of the hut stood open with the bright fire blazing inside, it was an easy matter for anyone to see the hut from the gorge, but in daylight one might pass the place a dozen times and not catch sight of it, as Dick very truly remarked.

A moment later the Unknown came out of the rift with a big fish horn in his hand which he blew for all he was worth.

"Come up here, boys and girls! Come up here!" he shouted. "I want to show you my find!"

"We can't spare the time. We've got too much to do," called Ned. "All the tools at the mine have been stolen and we've come back for our own!"

"Hello! Hello! Mischief!" cried the detective. "That settles it! We've got other enemies besides the Indians hanging around us here!"

Of course this agreed with Ned's theory exactly. He called to the Unknown for further details about the hut.

"Well, there's nobody up here," answered the detective, "but there is every evidence that some one has recently been here. The hut is occupied; has been right along, but isn't just now."

"Better give it up and come to the Mastodon mine with us," said Ned. "We've got to work, that's all there's about it. I'm going back there with the tools."

"I'll be with you soon," called the detective. "I've got a little more exploring to do here yet. By-by, boys! Remember I'm in the mysterious hut, and if you want to join me all you've got to do is to climb over the drifts."

Thus saying, the Unknown turned and was gone in an instant.

The boys tried to so place themselves that they could get a sight of the hut again, but they had not been careful to accurately note their former position, and it took fully five minutes to find it, and when they did get sight of the hut, the Unknown was no longer to be seen, nor did he answer them when they called.

"Oh, let him go!" said Ned. "We'll get back with the tools."

They did a fair day's work after all, and just after

dark, while the boys were picking and shoveling away in No. 1, Dick struck into a small nest of nuggets.

"Hold the lantern—quick, Ned!" he exclaimed. "I've got gold here, sure!"

This was welcome news surely, for in spite of the faithfulness with which the boys had worked their luck had been decidedly poor.

"It's gold!" said Young Klondike, kneeling down and peering into the sand. "A whole lot of tiny nuggets! Let down the bucket, Edith! We must look into this!"

Down rattled the bucket and Ned shoveled it full of the stuff, as Dick loosened it with the pick.

"Hoist away, Edith! A strike at last!" he cried. "Hooray! It's enough to wake up the old mastodon! To think that we should have hit it after all this toil. Three cheers for the Mastodon mine!"

But Young Klondike might as well have moderated his transports of joy, for the strike proved to be a very small sized one.

The next stroke of Dick's pick took them into gravel, and although Ned rubbed it in his hands and peered as closely as the lantern light would permit, he could not discover the first trace of gold.

"It's just a pocket," said Dick. "Well, at all events it shows what may be expected below."

"That's right! Still we may miss it altogether. We've seen those pockets before, you know. They don't always come to anything."

This was true enough. Indeed rather the reverse is the case, and when a mine shows these little pockets it may be looked upon with suspicion.

Young Klondike knew this perfectly well. He was trying to encourage himself, that was all.

It was now about half past four o'clock, and as dark as the darkest night.

Early in the afternoon the sky had clouded over, and there was every evidence that another snow-storm was close at hand.

"I guess we may as well get back to the hut," said Ned. "Strange the Unknown hasn't shown up before this.—He knows very well that I don't want him to go off on one of his periodical absences just now."

"But that is just what he has done," replied Dick. "No matter; we know where to look for him. We'll have to make a trip to the mysterious hut if he is not around when we get home."

They now put the dirt containing the nuggets in a basket and started back, Edith going ahead with the lantern.

When they reached the hut they were surprised to find the door standing wide open, which was strange, for they had taken particular pains to shut it, as they always did, and the Unknown never failed to do the same.

Yet when they entered they found the Unknown asleep in his bunk and snoring loudly.

"Tired out tramping through the snow," said Dick. "Let him lie there. He'll wake up by supper time, you bet!"



It was not Ned's style to let such a chance as this slip him—he was bound to shoot the bear.

Ned looked around a bit and then had to give it up, for the rocks rose on one side of him and there was the precipice on the other.

"This is a trick!" he exclaimed. "Those bears. There's trouble ahead. If those



he but  
I do.  
all less after  
the hut again  
opened the door; for when he tried once  
to arouse Dick he found it just impossible, and  
it was the same with the detective.

The slumber of the famous "Seven Sleepers" could not have been more profound than that of Ned's two friends.

Young Klondike now came to the conclusion that he had better wake up Edith, and he was just about to climb the loft ladder and knock on the trapdoor, when, chancing to look at the hearth he saw that the coffee pot stood there close to the coals.

Now Ned had seen Edith wash the coffee pot and put it away, and he at once jumped at the conclusion that the disguised Indians, as he now believed his visitors to have been, had been making themselves coffee.

He opened the lid of the pot, and sure enough it was half full.

Besides this there were bits of bread scattered around the hearth and a scrap or two of meat.

"By gracious, they've been helping themselves in the storeroom!" thought Ned.

He was chilled through from running out twice without his heavy coat, and it suddenly struck him to drink of the hot coffee. It could not go at all bad. He took the pot to him and took a good drink, and then suddenly drew it away and dropped it upon the hearth.

"Heavens! I'm poisoned!" he gasped. "What a fool I was! I might have known it! That's what's the matter with the Unknown and Dick."

While he was in the act of drinking, Ned suddenly felt his head begin to swim. When he first tasted the coffee he noticed that it had a peculiar bitter flavor, but until that strange sensation began to come over him he did not realize what had actually occurred.

"Drugged, by gracious!" he muttered, staggering back to the table. "What am I to do?"

He tried to call out for Edith, but his tongue seemed paralyzed.

Strange sensations were creeping over him.

Ned thought of morphine and he had just sense enough to recollect that the antidote for this was coffee.

"These scoundrels, whoever they may be, have mixed morphine with coffee so that a big lot could be given without killing," he reasoned. "Dick and the Unknown have got the doses somehow, and now I've got mine. What is to be done? It is no use to alarm Edith. She can't help me any! I must help myself. What I want is more coffee—lots of it and I must have it right now."

Perhaps, take it altogether, this was the luckiest thought of Ned's life.

It hit just right.

That was the poison which had been put in the

coffee and nothing but more coffee could possibly save him from falling into a deep sleep.

Springing up—for he had unconsciously dropped into a chair, Ned made a rush for the door and emptied the coffee pot out on the snow.

He staggered like a drunken man as he turned back into the room.

He was so sleepy now that it was all he could do to keep his eyes open while he made the coffee, pouring in hot water from the kettle which hung suspended over the fire by an iron chain.

Then he poured it out into a cup, and sat down by the table to drink it.

Before he could take the cup in his hand his head dropped on his breast—poor Ned was fast asleep.

But it was only for an instant.

He caught himself in the act, so to speak, and by a mighty effort was awake again.

"This won't do," he muttered. "I've got to drink this coffee. I've got to get out into the cold air and keep moving. Nothing else will save me from going the same way as the Unknown and Dick!"

He turned the whole contents of the cup down his throat with one gulp, then another and another.

It was impossible to drink any more. He felt that he could not hold it.

For an instant Ned rested his head on his hand and dropped off.

Then he awoke with a start, and knew that the worst was over.

He had got "a grip" on himself, so to speak.

Clutching at his rifle he flung open the door and let the cold air come streaming into the room.

This seemed to revive him a little. He took several great whiffs of the frosty air, and then staggering out made a mighty effort, and forced himself to run up and down.

After a little the sleepiness left him and he knew that he was safe, but he felt very weak and tired. It seemed as if he must lie down if only for a few moments.

"I shan't go to sleep now," he murmured. "No danger of that. I am not sleepy a bit."

Here was his mistake. He little knew the power of the drug which he had taken.

Stretching out in his bunk he was asleep before he knew it, but fortunately for him it was not that dreamless sleep which had come to Dick and the Unknown, and when about half an hour later there was a noise outside the door Ned awoke.

He had heard something, but what it was he did not know.

Listening for the moment and hearing no repetition of the sound, he came to the conclusion that he had been dreaming.

"It's all right," he muttered. "I just dropped off for the moment, but I won't do it again. I'll just lie here a little longer. May as well get my rifle, though, and be on the safe side."

It was a lucky thought, as he was soon to learn.



Getting sleepily out of the bunk, Young Klondike took his rifle and laid it alongside of him.

Then he closed his eyes and was asleep before he knew it, but it was not to be for long this time.

All at once he was awakened by a step on the floor close beside him.

Fortunately for Ned he only opened his eyes dreamily, and did not start up in the bunk as he might well have done.

To his horror he saw that the door was open.

Three men with bearskins drawn around them, the heads above their head and the paws hanging down, were moving about the room.

Ned had sense enough to close his eyes and pretend to be asleep.

But he kept one corner open and lay there quietly, taking in all that was going on.

The men were all strangers to him and they looked more like ordinary miners than the toughs. Their faces were not bad ones by any means. In fact, one of them looked like a decidedly intelligent man.

He was peering into the coffee pot which Ned had placed on the hearth, just where he found it.

"Say, boys, some of this coffee is gone," he said. "I fancy Young Klondike must have taken his dose."

"That's what's the matter, Doc," replied another, a large man with a heavy black beard. "Saved us the trouble of dosing him, eh?"

"Exactly," replied Doc, "I'm sorry to have to dose any of them, but the fact is, boys, they must be driven away from the creek before they make a strike at the place where poor Barnsley found the nugget up there by the mastodon. Once they hit it Young Klondike will flood the gorge with his men, and you know as well as I can tell you what that is going to mean for us."

"Don't talk. It will ruin us. I'd blame soon put a stop to their operations if I had my way."

"Yes, but you are not going to have your way, Joe Tower. There's nothing the matter with Young Klondike. He's all right; I'm not going to have him killed."

"It won't be all right for us if he lives, Doc. We've got a good thing, and if we can only hold on to it until spring it will make us all rich men."

"We will, Joe; we will. Don't you fret. I'm satisfied that this experience will drive them off. That blasted little detective is the worst. If I was inclined to do anything I'd take him first."

"Oh, we could do it so nice and easy as they lie there now, Doc; as for the girl we'd let her live and take care of her until some opportunity offered of sending her away, but of course she would have to think her friends had deserted her. It would never do to let her know what had happened to them, don't you see?"

Ned's hand was on his rifle. He was almost inclined to use it, but as he was anxious to know just who and what these men were he forebore, and lay as still as death, taking in everything.

The man talked a few moments more in the same strain.

Then Doc suddenly broke off, saying:

"What's the use in bothering with all this clatter? First thing you know one of them will wake up, and then there will be trouble. What we want is poor Barnsley's nugget and the other gold."

Ned's ears were wide open when this was said, even if his eyes were closed.

The other gold! What gold did they mean? Young Klondike knew of no gold but the nugget in the hut.

Then it seemed to him that he really knew very little of the Mastodon claim, anyhow. As yet he had not even seen the shaft where Mr. McCullagh did his work.

This was supposed to be up in the mountain.

The way to it lay through a narrow cut further down the creek, and as this had been half blockaded with snow when Young Klondike's party came into the gorge he had made no attempt to explore it. Whether the Unknown had done so or not he did not know.

Ned now began to think that his mistake had been in not thoroughly exploring the region at the start. He lay there listening to the talk, which was highly interesting since Joe Tower persisted in his idea that there ought to be a general massacre.

At the first sign of Doc yielding, Ned would have been ready to use his rifle, but it did not come to that.

Doc won the argument and Joe sulkily gave up.

"Very well; you'll regret it—you'll see," he declared.

"Drop it," replied Doc. "Let's begin our search for the gold."

"You won't find it, you know how many times we have searched before," was the reply.

"I'm going to act on my last idea. These floor boards are coming up."

"You'll have the girl down then, and some of the others awake."

"No, I won't. I've bolted the trap on the under side and she can't budge it; as for these fellows they are too far gone in the morphine sleep to make us any trouble now."

Doc then produced a long, cold-chisel and a hammer from some mysterious pocket in his bearskin coat, and moving the table and chairs over into one corner deliberately began to pry up the floor boards of the hut.

"They'll get the nuggets now, and I don't see how I'm going to stop them," thought Ned. "Three against one! It won't do! For the sake of Dick and the Unknown I shall have to let the gold go."

Just then a shrill blast whistled down the gorge. The wind was evidently rising; the storm was increase.

Doc noticed this, and called to Joe and see what it meant.



"It's snowing ten times harder than ever," was Joe's report, when he came back into the hut where Doc and the third man were still at work on the boards.

"Going to be a blizzard, I reckon," replied Doc. "Well, boys, we may have trouble getting back."

"Which we don't want," growled Joe. "How much longer is it going to take to get them boards up? Seems to me you are thundering slow."

"I'm getting all the nails out first so that when they begin to come all will come together. Don't want to make any more noise than necessary and that's the easiest way."

Evidently Doc was an expert at this sort of business for in a moment he began to take the boards up one by one exposing the spaces between the timbers beneath.

"That settles the nugget," thought Ned. He saw that Doc had his hand on the biggest pieces and the others followed it out of the hole.

"There you are!" exclaimed Doc. "There's poor Barnsley's nugget. I reckon we have more right to it than Young Klondike as far as that goes."

"How in thunder are we going to carry these pieces with the rest of the gold?" growled Joe.

"At it again? Always raising objections. We'll bury it in the snow outside and come back after it to-morrow. Heavens, how the wind does howl. If a blizzard strikes down the gorge and hits this hut fair, she'll go over, sure pop."

"So much the more reason why we should hurry up," replied Joe.

"The gold! The gold!"

Doc ripped up two more boards. He was very close to Ned now.

"Here it is!" he cried, stooping down and running his hand in under the next board.

When he drew it out he grasped a small bag heavy with gold dust.

Another and another followed; six came out altogether, and just as Doc took out the last the blizzard struck the gorge.

Phew! what a roar and clatter there was!

How shall we describe it?

If anyone had asked Young Klondike to do so five minutes later, he would have found it a very difficult matter.

All that Ned knew was that when that awful roar came the whole hut seemed to tremble, and then followed a thunderous crash.

For the hut turned over on its side and Ned went tumbling out of the bunk, the rifle still grasped in his hands.

The last he saw of the "three bears" they were scrambling out from under the ruins on all fours.

Ned pulled himself up, and crouching under the timbers of the loft, fired a few shots right out.

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is served the purpose of sending the  
ter.

At all events they did not come back again.

They had gone and left a golden treasure behind.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BIG STRIKE UNDER THE MASTODON.

FOR Young Klondike to pick himself up and collect his wits did not take long, you may be very sure.

There was plenty to be done there among the ruins of the hut, if he hoped to save the life of his friends.

In the first place the coals from the hearth were setting the boards on fire; in the next Edith was calling loudly for help while Dick was half buried under his bunk, and the Unknown was lying face downward upon the floor as still and silent as if he had been dead. Yes, quick action was needed then, and Ned was equal to the emergency.

His first care was to stamp out the burning coals and shout to Edith to keep up her courage.

Then he managed to crawl to the loft ladder and fix it so that he could reach the trapdoor which now opened sideways, for the upper part of the hut had partly collapsed, and the loft was resting against the rocks at an angle of forty-five degrees.

It required care and patience to get Edith out, but Young Klondike did it, and in as few words as possible explained what had occurred.

Meanwhile Dick had been rescued from his uncomfortable position and the Unknown turned over on his back and some of the loose boards piled up against the open door which could no longer be closed.

Thus in a measure Edith and Ned were protected from the fury of the storm, and thus they remained crouching there in a most uncomfortable position until almost morning when the Unknown suddenly awoke.

The little detective was immensely chagrined at what had occurred.

If we were to detail all he said it would take up many pages and to no purpose.

All the Unknown could offer in explanation of the condition in which Ned had discovered him was that when he came back into the hut late in the afternoon he found a pot of coffee simmering on the hearth and drank freely of it, supposing that Edith had left it there.

When Dick woke up it was almost daylight.

Things were in better shape then, for Ned and Edith had been hard at work, and as soon as the Unknown was able he lent a hand.

Of course, they could not get the hut back into position, but they had fixed up the door so that it could be shut, and rigged up the stovepipe which served as a chimney, so that it went out through a hole in the siding, which Ned cut for the purpose and would draw.

The big stone which had served as the hearth was



wedged in under it, and Ned nailed up a piece of sheet iron to protect the boarding, and started a fire going.

In these uncomfortable quarters they sat down to breakfast, and to compare notes on the strange events of the night.

"As for me," remarked Dick, "I've got nothing to say, for I don't know anything. I just went to sleep and I woke up again—that is all."

"Didn't you feel anything of the shock when the hut went over?" asked Edith. "It woke me up instantly. I was almost frightened to death."

No, Dick had felt nothing, strange as it may seem.

The only explanation seemed to be that the man who must have forced a morphine powder down his throat while Ned was out after the supposed bear.

It did not seem possible that he could have been made to drink the drugged coffee in his sleep.

Now the conversation took another turn. There was the gold to be looked at and discussed, and the adventures of the Unknown to be talked about.

There was a good deal of the gold, as much as fifty thousand dollars, Ned estimated.

How it came to be in the hut was something of a mystery; but Ned felt sure that the man spoken of as Barnsley could be no one else than the poor frozen wretch they had buried under the snow.

"But how could he have dug all this gold here and Mr. McCullagh and his men never have known it?" questioned Edith. "That is the point I don't understand."

No one could explain; they could only guess.

The Unknown's theory was that there had been some of Mr. McCullagh's men who remained behind after the others left.

"And they stayed behind because they had robbed him," he added. "They were probably working some secret lead all along and are working it still, and it will all be my work to find out the truth about all this mystery. Meanwhile I regard this gold as Mr. McCullagh's property, and I say we ought to take care of it and report the case to him."

"We'll hide it," replied Ned. "Those fellows can't get it again, anyhow; but how about the mysterious hut?"

"Well, I found it," replied the detective, "and I found two ways of getting there. I did a lot of exploring around among the rocks, too, but that amounted to nothing. That's about all I have to tell."

But it was not all he had to say by any means, for the Unknown went into the most minute details about his adventures, and while he was still talking the sun came up, and with its rising the storm passed away.

It had been mostly wind, very little snow had fallen. It cleared off comparatively warm, too, which was most unusual for the Klondike, and when our friends went out of the hut it was hard to believe that they had been through such a terrible night.

"First of all we must see that hut up there," declared Ned. "I won't do another stroke on the mine till I know all about it."

"What are we going to do about a house to live in?" asked Dick. "Of course we can't stay here."

"We might fix this place up for the dogs and live in the shed," suggested the detective.

"Not at all," said Edith. "Let's take our tents right up to the Mastodon and bank them in with snow and hemlock boughs. It would take just about a day to fix ourselves up, but after that we would be comfortable enough."

"I suppose the hut up on the rocks is not to be thought of," said Ned. "I wonder where McCullagh's men lived?"

They had often thought of this before, but had been too busy to do any exploring.

Now the Unknown laughed, and said:

"Well, I meant to keep that as a surprise for you, boys. There are half a dozen huts up there on the rocks, and McCullagh's mine is there, too. No wonder he did not want to work it in the winter. It's located in a most awfully inconvenient place."

Of course this announcement made them all the more anxious to go on the exploring trip.

"I'll take you up one way and down the other," said the Unknown, and then he led on up the rocks by the way which Ned had followed the trail of the supposed bears.

When they came to the big drift the Unknown brushed away the loose snow, and running his hands into the drift, pulled out a great mass of snow frozen as solid as a cake of ice.

"An ice door!" he exclaimed. "This is the work of those men. Here's your road to the hut, Young Klondike. Look out now that we don't have a fight."

Behind the ice door a tunnel through the drift had been dug.

It was about five feet in length, and with the Unknown in the lead they passed cautiously through it, coming in a moment to the mouth of the rift between the rocks.

This led them into a deep glen with rocks rising on all sides. Here stood the hut, and there were several others scattered about; also a shaft house and a dump and everything belonging to a mine.

Mr. McCullagh's mine now lay exposed to full view, and they proceeded to make a close examination of it, for there was nobody there to hinder them.

The place seemed entirely deserted. There were no footprints in the freshly fallen snow.

This ended the explorations of the day, and three days passed without further trouble.

If it had not been for the ruined hut, Ned might almost have come to think that the happenings of that dreadful night were all a dream.

The first day was spent in fixing up a shelter at the mine.

There were plenty of hemlocks growing further up



the gorge, and great quantities of boughs were cut and dragged down to the new camp.

Then two tents were rigged up under the shelter of some overhanging ledges, and the snow was banked up around them and the boughs piled about on all sides to shelter them from the wind.

The next move was to build a shelter for the dogs out of the hemlock boughs alone. In this Young Klondike was a perfect expert, and before night they had all snug and comfortable; in fact, the shelter was quite as warm as the shed.

Dusk was upon them by the time they had finished, but they were still able to bring up an old stove out of the shed at the ruined hut.

This was set in place in Edith's tent, and as for the boys and the Unknown they were perfectly content to wrap themselves up in their blankets and sleep in the cold.

But there was no sleep for the Unknown that night.

The little detective insisted upon doing guard duty till morning, but as it turned out he might just as well have gone to bed.

There was no alarm. Nothing occurred. When Ned awoke the Unknown was pacing up and down like a sentinel.

"I reckon they have made up their minds to leave us alone," he said; "by the Jumping Jeremiah I just wish they had come! I owe that fellow Doc one for trying to poison me."

Now this was all very well for the Unknown to say, but Young Klondike had no such wish. All he wanted was to be allowed to work quietly on his own land, and he had already determined to go about his business just as though nothing had occurred.

But of course it was necessary to keep a strict watch, so work on No. 2 was abandoned, and the Unknown was detailed to do guard duty, while Ned, Dick and Edith concentrated all their efforts on No. 1.

That day's work brought no result. From the gravel that was hoisted out of the shaft a little gold was washed after dark, snow water melted over the stove being used for the purpose, but it did not amount to anything worth talking about, and things began to look pretty blue.

Next day it started in just the same; the only difference was they had now gone below the frost line, and the ground was more easily worked.

Toward noon Ned began to despair of ever finding anything of value, and he leaned upon his spade, saying:

"Well, I declare, Dick, I've a good mind to give this fight up."

"Don't say that," replied Dick. "It isn't a bit like you. The fact that the big nugget was found in this hole shows that there ought to be more."

"I wonder if it does. Do you know I am almost getting around to the belief that it don't show anything of the sort."

"Sicker horses than this have got well, Ned."

"I know, but all the same I'm getting awful tired

of this business. Fact is, we ought not to have come up here without men enough to do the rough work."

"Pshaw!" cried Dick; "we used to be equal any amount of work. I should hate to think that wasn't so now."

"What's that—what's that?" called Edith, who was working the bucket. "Why don't you fellows go to work down there instead of standing around talking?"

"Ned wants to give up," said Dick.

"No, I don't! I was only saying that I had a good mind to," replied Ned, rather ashamed.

"Nonsense!" cried Edith. "Look at the gold we have actually got in our possession, which we as good as know all came off the land around this creek. Do that look as though we were going to have our labor for our pains?"

"But we can only be sure about the nugget," said Ned. "As for the gold in the bags, we don't know where that came from, and the fact remains that McCullagh could not make these mines pay."

"Go to work, boys," said Edith, in her emphatic way. "Keep it up until dark anyhow, and then when the Unknown comes in we will hold a council of war and decide what is to be done."

"All right," said Ned, cheerfully. "I'm sure I don't want to do any loafing. We can only take another hack at it and see how we come out."

Now, this conversation is only given to show the uncertainties of mining, and how unsafe it is to predict what will happen in working a prospect hole, this was nothing more.

"Look here," exclaimed Ned, suddenly, after having taken out a few shovelfuls of dirt. "I've got an idea."

"Out with it!" said Dick. "Anything for a change and to make you more comfortable. What is your idea?"

"Well, I reason this way: according to our experience in mining we have passed below the level where we ought reasonably to expect to find gold in the shaft."

"Exactly."

"We have found some which shows that there is gold around, and that all things being equal, we ought to find more."

"That's right, too, but you claim that our find is only a little pocket."

"I know; we'll admit that I was mistaken and that instead of being a pocket that find was an offshoot of a bigger deposit. Where did we strike our pocket?"

"In the black sand, as we always do, of course."

"Exactly, and we have gone down a good five feet below the place and don't find any more; now I let us drift on the line of the strike."

This perhaps needs a word of explanation.

Young Klondike's idea being that instead of working down toward a rich deposit of gold they were actually working alongside of it, he now proposed to go back to the place where the find had been made and work sideways, or drift, on the line of the g



ready discovered, in the hope that it would lead them to the main deposit of which the one already struck was only a spur.

This plan has been often followed out by miners with good success, for which reason Ned was fully justified in proposing it now.

"Good enough!" cried Dick. "I'm sure I'm agreeable; but we'll have to rig up some kind of scaffolding to stand on; we are too low down to work on that place now."

"That's easy done," said Ned. "We'll take one of the provision boxes. I can stand on that."

They then started to carry the plan out.

Ned went up to the ground level, and emptying the box lowered it into the hole.

To his great satisfaction it brought him up almost a level with the strike line, so that he could easily mark his drift.

"It's going to take us in under the mastodon," said Dick, who remained in the bottom of the shaft to shovel up the dirt which Ned threw down.

"That's for luck," laughed Young Klondike. "If we make a strike it shall be called the Mastodon mine."

"What does McCullagh call his?"

"The Crescent, I think. He has one of that name, but I'm not dead sure that it is the one up here on Mastodon creek."

"That don't make any difference. Ours shall be the Mastodon, anyway, and if he has already appropriated the name then ours is Mastodon No. 2."

"Look out! Here comes a lot of stuff!" called Ned, who had driven the bar into the half frozen soil. Down fell the clods of earth and Dick examined them carefully, declaring that he could not see a trace of gold.

"Never mind," said Ned. "Here goes for another. Three feet will bring us right under the mastodon's nose, and it won't take long to get at a sample of the ore in there. We can straighten up the drift later."

"Is it very much frozen?" asked Dick.

"Pretty well. Not as hard as I thought it was going to be, though. I think the mastodon must have protected it somewhat."

Ned continued to work away, Edith watching his operations eagerly from the ground above.

He had nothing else to do now, for Ned decided to stop more hoisting until they had ascertained the result of his experiment.

If gold should be struck in the drift, it would be necessary to shovel back the dirt already taken out, in order to bring the hole up to a level with the top of the box.

At last Ned announced that he was in two feet and half on the drift.

"Now, we will decide if there is anything in this drift of mine or not," he declared. "The next scoop will bring me under the mastodon, Dick. If we don't strike anything then, I stand ready to give it up."

And Ned did give it up, but not in the way his words implied.

Driving the bar in as far as he could possibly force it, he tugged and tugged until he could feel the earth begin to move.

"Look out, Dick! Something is coming!" he cried.

And so there was. The frozen earth gave way the next instant.

So did the box.

Down came Ned, with the bar and a big lot of earth following him.

He struck Dick and tumbled him over, and it was a wonder that one of them was not seriously hurt.

Edith called down in great alarm to know how the case stood.

"Oh, we are all right," laughed Ned. "I pulled a bit too hard on the bar, and the box tipped over—that's all. Nothing to worry about. Worst of it is Dick might have had his brains knocked out, and—why, look here! Gold! Gold!"

And gold it was sure enough! The lumps of earth brought out with the bar fairly bristled with tiny nuggets.

"We've struck it! We've struck it!" shouted Dick. "Gold under the mastodon! Hooray!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MIDNIGHT CAPTURE.

WHEN the Unknown came into camp just at nightfall, Young Klondike and his friends had great news to tell.

"It's my opinion we are going to make the biggest strike on record," declared Ned. "I never saw the nuggets so nested together as they lie there in that drift."

The Unknown went down into the shaft and had his look.

It was precisely as Ned had stated. The nuggets were embedded in the earth in one solid mass; one could scarcely put a pin's point between them.

There were no very large ones and this is not desirable, for the small nuggets pay the best every time, being invariably found in greater quantity.

These ran from the size of a pea to about the size of a hickory nut.

Of course the only question now remaining to be solved was the extent of the deposit.

If it ran well down, as from indications there was every reason to believe, the success of the Mastodon mine was assured.

But good hard work was necessary in order to demonstrate this.

To work in the drift as they had begun would be too clumsy a method to be entertained for a moment.

A new shaft would have to be sunk under the mastodon, and this, of course, would take time.

That night the proposed council of war was held



and it was most emphatically decided to keep on with the work.

Now this decision only goes to show how hardened our Klondikers had become to danger.

The thought that they were working there in that lonely gorge with dangerous enemies all around them did not influence their decision one bit.

They had come out after gold, and they had found it. No matter what the danger might be, they proposed to carry out their plan to the end.

Provisions were still plentiful, and they were really very comfortable in their new quarters—far more so than we tenderfeet in warmer climates can imagine, for, with their thick, warm clothing and heavy blankets to roll themselves up in at night, they did not suffer in the least from the cold, although some of the days which followed were pretty severe.

Next morning, after a brief examination of the drift they went right at work on the new shaft.

The ground was cleared under the mastodon, and a big frost fire built which made those old bones crackle.

The worst was the streams of water which came down from the melting ice. It took constant care to keep the fire going, but they persevered, and by the end of the week had worked this new hole down almost to the level of the drift.

"To-morrow being Sunday, we will knock off work," said Ned. "I don't believe in working on Sunday, if we can help it. Besides, we need the rest, and I want to go up there to McCullagh's old diggings on the rocks again."

This plan was carried out.

As soon as it was daylight, all hands set out for the mysterious hut.

They had no difficulty in reaching it, but no sooner had they entered the glen than they saw traces of the enemy.

Footprints were all over the snow here, running in among the huts and particularly about the shaft.

They were not surprised at this, however, for the Unknown had been there many times and had warned them how it would be.

"The strangest part of it is, Young Klondike," he now remarked, "that they seem to begin and end over there against those rocks at the back of the glen. Why they should all run up to that particular point I can't imagine, but they do."

"No way up on the rocks there?" asked Ned.

"None that I can find."

"What lies beyond?"

"That is more than I can tell you. I've tried several times to climb up on the rocks, but I've always failed."

"Let it remain a mystery then. What I want to find out now is what sort of pay dirt McCullagh was working in at the bottom of that shaft, when he shut the mine down."

"That's easily ascertained."

"Yes. I propose to go down into the shaft and look."

It was an easy matter to get down into this shaft for although it was down forty feet with two drifts there was a regular hoisting arrangement in place.

Ned went down in the big tub, and reported a good showing at the bottom of the shaft.

He did not go into the drifts, which seemed quite extensive and appeared to be rather choked up with rubbish.

"I wouldn't waste any more time working this mine if I owned it," he declared. "It's too high on the ledges to ever yield a great amount of gold."

"Does it seem to be in gravel still?" asked Dick.

"Yes; there is no sign of rock. I can easily understand why McCullagh started it. The idea is that there has been an immense washing down of gravel which has almost filled up this glen, reckoning from the line of Mastodon creek, of course, and that that deposit lots of gold ought to be found."

"A good deal has been found," said Dick. "McCullagh told me that he had taken as much as a hundred thousand dollars out of this shaft."

"Yes, but oh, so finely distributed? And how much has it cost him? I doubt if it has much more than paid, for I never knew of his doing any work for himself."

Now that is one trouble with mining of all kinds which most people scarcely ever stop to think about.

A mine may be struck which on the face shows a good deposit of gold, but immediately comes the question of expense.

There are hundreds of abandoned mines in Colorado, Arizona and other places, including California, which in time may pay to work if railroads are built near them, or towns spring up in the region reducing the cost of labor.

The expense of working a deep mine is always great, and Young Klondike felt that there was little chance of ever making this shaft pay, which certainly did not encourage him about his own big strike down there between the mastodon's legs.

But the results of the next few days only go to show how foolish it is to be discouraged in mining matters. The only way is to weigh facts for what they are worth and act accordingly. Discouragement never pays.

The result of Monday's work under the mastodon was most satisfactory.

During the first hour they penetrated to the bottom deposit.

It was just the same as they had found it in the drift, one mass of nuggets closely bedded together.

All that day they continued to work through the drift and there was no sign of giving out.

Roughly estimated the result of that one day's work was fully ten thousand dollars.

This was enormous. It aroused the wildest enthusiasm with Young Klondike's party.

"We must go into business here at once," declared Ned that night. "I'd like to put a hundred men to work on this shaft within twenty-four hours; then, Dick, how near to it can we come?"



"I should say that fifteen would be the most we could spare from the Death Creek diggings without interfering with the work down there."

"Then we must have those fifteen up here at once. We'll take one of the dog teams and go down after them?"

"Of course that means me," said the Unknown. "Well, I'm ready to start right away to-night."

"It don't necessarily mean you," replied Ned. "I'll go if you say so."

"No; I had better go. I'm a drone in the beehive, so to speak. I don't mind doing my share of work—it isn't that, but by the Jumping Jeremiah, every time I undertake to do it I'll be hanged if something don't occur to knock me out."

The fact was, the Unknown was always ready to be knocked out when hard work was in question, but was ready enough to drive the dogs to Death Creek, and they started him off within an hour's time.

Under favorable circumstances he might be expected back on the morning of the third day.

Circumstances were favorable, and back promptly came the Unknown, bringing the men with him and a lot of other things besides.

He took three dog teams to draw the load.

There were two portable houses which Young Klondike had ordered in Dawson City some weeks before, and which by good fortune reached Death Creek ahead of the Unknown.

When there were boxes and boxes of canned goods, such as bacon, hams and potatoes and all sorts of supplies, besides many other things necessary to the support of so many men.

Of course the Unknown's first question was concerning the success of the mine, and in answering Ned had great news to report.

"It's the biggest strike of all!" he declared. "Do you know how much Dick and I have taken out with our own hands since you have been gone?"

"No, I'm sure I don't," replied the detective. "Guess."

"A million?"

"Come, that's nonsense. If we had worked in solid rock there would scarcely have been time for it."

"Ten thousand more?"

"Fifty thousand, roughly estimated, and I want to come down and have a look at the shaft."

When the Unknown saw the appearance of things at the shaft, he could not refrain from an exclamation of surprise and delight.

On all sides there was the same display of nuggets closely packed in between the sand and gravel.

The deposit seemed scarcely to have been disturbed.

It had already yielded sixty thousand dollars, and seemed no good reason why it should not yield a great deal more—ten times as much—from what was already in sight.

Now this meant half a million, and it was not at

all likely that the deposit would prove exhausted then.

In short, Young Klondike's Mastodon mine had proved itself to be of immense value, and would fully justify him in going to any expense.

For several days following little or no work was done on the mine.

Young Klondike felt that the best thing to do was to get the houses up and make everybody comfortable, and it was well that he did so, for the mild spell passed away in a big snowstorm by the end of the week, and after it ceased there was a drop to forty below zero.

This would have made things decidedly unpleasant in the tents, but in the little houses all hands were as snug as could be, and by the following Monday were ready to go to work again.

That Monday's work gave one of the greatest yields Young Klondike had ever had in twenty-four hours.

Thirteen thousand six hundred dollars he figured up.

Six men were put at the shaft under the mastodon, and six in the old shaft to run drifts, so as to tap the big deposit at a lower level.

The remaining three, under Ned's direction, started to turn the ground for a new shaft beyond the mastodon, where the deposit could reasonably be expected to be struck in a new place.

All this time nothing had been seen of the enemy, and as for the Indians they had been forgotten.

Young Klondike had long ago come to the conclusion that the latter were nothing more than a wandering band, who had passed down the gorge by accident, going on about their business, and this was, indeed, the case.

As for Doc's gang, it looked very much as if they had given up the fight, but where they were hiding was the mystery still.

Edith was sure that they had left the region altogether, but this Ned could scarcely believe.

"I want to know about it, though," he declared, "and I think we ought to take steps to find out. It is anything but comfortable to feel that a gang of men may come pouncing down upon you at any time. Of course we are too strong for them to attack now—I admit that—but they are liable to try for their revenge some other way, which may prove very unpleasant if not fatal to some of us. The long and short of it is something ought to be done."

"There's just one thing to do if you want to draw them out of their hole," said the detective.

"What's that?"

"For some of us to sleep in the hut up at the McCullagh mine."

"Do you think they would attack us?"

"I think they would be pretty apt to try. You take that fellow, Joe; he's not one of the kind to give up from the way you describe him."

"Well, why hasn't he tried his hand before now?"



Why didn't he come down on us while you were gone, and we three were alone?"

"Ask me something easy; I can't tell you; but I hold to my opinion all the same."

"I'm willing to pass a night in the hut any time," said Dick. "I want to get square for that drugging business. I'll go with you any time you say the word."

"We'll do it to-night," said Ned, "but Edith must remain behind."

They were as good as their word, but Edith made the most strenuous objections to remaining behind.

Still the boys would not hear to her going, and in the end she had to yield.

At seven o'clock the boys, accompanied by the Unknown, started for the hut in the glen.

Of course they were running a big risk. They knew this, but they were not the kind to hold back on that account.

All had their rifles, and Ned carried a lantern to light them on their way up the rocks.

The idea was to make all the display of their movement possible, in the hope of drawing the enemy out.

We state nothing but the simple truth, when we say that they went into that hut without the least fear.

Ned's first care was to build a roaring fire on the hearth; then he shut in the windows and bolted the door.

After all was snug and comfortable, they sat down to a social game of cards, for of course there was no thought of sleeping.

They played until midnight, and still nothing had occurred.

When Ned looked at his watch and found that it was twelve o'clock, he threw down his cards, and taking up his rifle declared that he was going out to have a look around.

"What's the use?" asked Dick. "You don't hear anything, do you?"

"No; but I'm in the mind to do it. We may see something. Perhaps they are watching us to see when we turn in—who can tell?"

"It seemed to me," said the Unknown, "that I heard a slight sound outside the door a few moments ago, but as I didn't hear it again I said nothing about it."

Ned smiled and put on his hat.

"You heard it, too, you rascal! You know you did!" cried the detective. "That's what's taking you out."

"Well, I own I thought I heard something," replied Ned, "although like you, I couldn't be sure."

"We'll all go out," said Dick. "We'll make a turn all around the glen. If there is anybody prowling about we'll be pretty sure to discover them."

Ned threw open the door and they sallied forth.

The instant the light of the fire shot out across the snow they saw that they had made no mistake.

There stood three dark figures about twenty feet away, looking toward the hut.

Ned and Dick flung up their rifles.

"Surrender there! We want you!" cried the Unknown.

Instead of answering the three figures—one seemed to be a boy—turned and ran for all they were worth toward the shaft house.

Ned and Dick fired, aiming high purposely. They did not want to do any killing; what they hoped for was that the shots would bring the men to a halt.

But it had no such effect.

The fugitives ran into the shaft house and vanished.

"They are going out the other door!" cried Ned.

"They mean to put the shaft house between us and them, so that we can't see which way they go."

"After them!" shouted the Unknown. "Quick! Quick! Run around the shaft house and head them off on the other side!"

Right here was where they made their mistake.

When they got around the shaft house there was no one visible, but the creaking of the rope running through the pulley block in the shaft house told them that some one was going down into the mine.

"They are inside!" exclaimed Ned. "They are going down into the mine—what can that mean?"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we'll soon find out," cried the Unknown, making a rush for the shaft house.

At the same instant a wild cry rang out upon the night.

It sounded almost ghostly there in the gloom, it was a cry of agony and despair.

Rushing into the shaft house, with their rifles ready for instant action, they could see nobody, but when they listened at the mouth of the shaft they could distinctly hear groans below.

"Hello!" shouted Ned. "Hello! Is anybody down there?"

"Yes," came the faint response. "I surrender. You've captured me. Spare my life!"

Here was a strange midnight capture!

As yet it only added to the mystery which hung about the place.

Who was it that lay groaning at the bottom of the shaft?

## CHAPTER IX.

### LITTLE DAN.

"WHO are you?"

Young Klondike, leaning over the edge of the shaft as far as he dared, shouted the question at the top of his voice.

"I'm nobody but little Dan," was the faint response. "I think my leg is broken. Don't kill gentlemen—don't, please!"



"We are not killing anyone," replied Ned. "What happened to you? Did you fall down?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Where are the others?"

"Oh, they are gone, mister, they are gone! Get up out of here. I'm only a boy; I can't do you any harm."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is strange!" cried the Unknown, and so it was, for boys in the Klondike country are scarce.

"I'll go down after him," said Ned. "Help me to pull the tub up."

"By the way, the tub was up when we left it," declared the Unknown. "You'd better look out for yourself, Ned. This may be only a ruse. Like as not the two men are down at the bottom of the shaft or lying in one of the drifts."

"I'll have to take my chances on that."

"But we don't want you to take chances. Hello, down there! Hello!"

"Hello!" came the faint response.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes; all alone."

"Where have those two men gone to?"

"I can't tell you. Oh, won't you help me? I'm suffering terrible pain."

"Lower the lantern down and have a look," suggested Dick.

There were several coils of rope hanging up in the shaft house, and it was an easy matter to tie the lantern to one of them and lower it down.

When it struck bottom they could distinctly see the boy lying there, but there was certainly no one else at the bottom of the shaft.

"I'm going down," declared Ned. "I'm willing to take the risk."

So they hoisted up the tub, and Ned getting into it was lowered to the bottom of the shaft.

The boy lay there still and silent; indeed, he had not answered the last calls given by the Unknown.

Ned saw at a glance that he must have fainted. He was only a little fellow, not more than ten years old. Young Klondike raised him tenderly, and managed to get him into the tub in a sitting position.

One of his legs hung limp; it was evidently broken at the knee.

Ned then stood upon the rim of the bucket, and Dick and the Unknown hoisted them out of the hole. "Ye gods and little fishes, you've got him!" cried the detective. "What ails him, anyhow? Is he dead?"

"No; I think he has only fainted."

"His leg seems to be broken."

"That's what's the matter."

"Probably it was the pain that made him faint."

"More than likely. Here, help me lift him out. We'd better carry him up to the hut."

"We'll find out who he is first," said the detective, they lifted the boy out of the tub and laid him on the floor of the shaft house. "See, he's coming to his

senses. He'll be able to give an account of himself in a minute now."

The boy opened his eyes and stared around.

"What's the matter with me?" he gasped. "Where's Doc?"

"Just what we'd like to know," replied the detective. "We'll attend to your leg. We'll take good care of you. Needn't be afraid of us."

"Oh, I can't tell you, I can't!" groaned the boy, who seemed to be suffering terribly.

"Can't? What's the reason you can't?" demanded the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, you must!"

"Don't be hard with him, Zed," said Dick. "Poor little chap! He's in terrible pain."

"So will we be if we get one of Doc's bullets into our hide."

"You needn't be afraid. They won't touch you to-night," said the boy. "I promise you that much. Perhaps they won't touch you at all."

Ned drew the Unknown aside, for he still persisted in questioning the boy.

"Let up on it," he said. "Can't you see that this capture is likely to prove a big thing for us?"

"It will if we can only make the little snoozer tell what he knows."

"We'll manage that later. Treat him well first and gain his confidence."

"I suppose you will have your way, Ned. Of course the boy's leg has got to be looked after, and I suppose we may as well do it now."

"We'll take you to the hut, Dan," said Ned. "Nobody is going to do you the least harm—trust me."

"But I can't walk," groaned the boy. "How am I going to get to the hut?"

"Get on my back, I'll carry you. It will be easier than if two take you. Lift him up, Dick. He can clasp his arms about my neck and ride as easy as if he was in a Pullman car."

They soon had little Dan inside the hut lying on a mattress, from one of the bunks which was placed on the floor before the fire.

Then the Unknown stripped off his coat and went to work to do the surgical act, at which he was really quite skillful.

The boy's trousers were removed, and the broken limb exposed.

It was a simple fracture, just above the knee; and the Unknown had no difficulty in setting the bone, after which he bound it up as well as he could, and the brave little fellow who scarcely made a sound during the painful operation was lifted on the mattress into the bunk.

Not until he was made entirely comfortable would Ned permit a single question to be put to him.

"Now, Dan," he said at last, "you must tell us just what happened, and how you came to fall."

"I slipped, and the tub turned over with me," replied the boy. "That was the way, boss. Oh, I thought I was killed."



"But how came you to be standing in the tub?"

Dan was silent.

"Where were you going?"

Dan never answered a word.

"Won't you tell me?" asked Ned, kindly.

"No, boss."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I can't."

"That's no answer. Why can't you?"

"'Cause I promised not to. Doc will kill me if I do."

"Is Doc your father?"

"No—oh, no!"

"Is Joe Tower your father?"

"No—o!" exclaimed Dan, in tones of great contempt. "S'pose I'd have him for a father? I guess not!"

"Of course you know who we are?" persisted Ned.

"I s'pose one of you is Young Klondike. I dunno which."

"I'm Young Klondike."

"That's what I thought."

"Haven't I used you right, Dan?"

"Yes, you have, boss."

"Then do the same by me and tell me what I want to know."

No answer.

"Won't you tell me, Dan?"

"No, boss, I can't."

"At least tell me where those two men went."

"No."

"Perhaps you won't mind telling me who they were? That can't do any harm."

"Oh, you know them."

"Doc and Joe Tower?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. You know those two men hate me and will harm me if they can."

"They don't hate you, boss."

"You are sure of what you say?"

"Yes."

"But they tried to poison me."

"I am not going to say any more," said Dan, turning his head away. "I suppose I've got to stay here now, but I don't care so long as you give me enough to eat."

"We'll tame him by and by, leave it to me," whispered Ned. "It will come out all right in the end."

They left the boy lying quietly in the bunk, and went outside to have a talk.

"What do you make out of it, Zed?" asked Young Klondike. "I suppose you'll say we ought to have made the boy tell what he knows before we set his leg."

"No, I don't say that because it would have been inhuman, but if you had let me question him just a little bit further he might have thought we were going to leave him and we would have found out what we want to know."

"I couldn't bear to do it."

"No, of course not. That's you all over, Ned; but if you ask me what I make out of it all I say that those two fellows went through one of the drifts into a cave or some other hiding place underground. I can't see it any other way."

"I've come to the same conclusion myself," said Dick. "Do we want to follow up that idea or not?"

"It will be a big risk."

"If we should happen to run against them in the drift there might be trouble, I suppose, but the risk would be no greater for us than it would be for them."

"What do you say, Ned?" asked the detective.

"I say let's do it. Anything is better than remaining idle. We've got a clew; let's follow it up and see where it leads us."

"So I say. We've got the boy, and he will be a great protection. They will hardly kill us while he is in our hands."

"You heard what Dan said, that Doc and Joe would not want to harm us?"

"Yes, but I don't believe it. Never mind, though we are off for the shaft. The idea is just this—I and Joe went down first and got into the drift, leaving Dan, who had done the lowering of the tub, to get out in the best way he could."

"I believe you; and the tub turned on him."

"More likely he was clinging to the rope, and meant to swing off into the drift, but got going so fast that he couldn't stop."

"That's the true explanation, no doubt, and as one of us has got to go down the same way, we might as well look out we don't meet with poor Dan's fate; here we are. Now, for it. I'm most curious to see where this adventure is going to end."

They had been hurrying toward the shaft hole while talking, and entering now stood listening for a few moments at the mouth of the hole.

"Everything seems to be quiet," said the detective at last. "If we are going to try it, now is certainly our time."

"Who'll go first?" asked Dick.

"I claim that honor," replied the Unknown.

"The post of honor is for him who comes last," said Ned, "and I claim that."

"Oh, do you!" exclaimed Dick. "I don't know whether you'll get it or not. I claim that for myself."

"No squabbling," said the detective. "Let's get down and I'll break the ice by throwing the lantern light into the drift."

Now there were two drifts running out of the shaft in large tunnels, almost big enough for a man to stand upright in. The work on Mr. McCullagh's mine appeared to have been very carefully done.

One went off to the right, and the other to the left. The right hand drift led over toward the rocks at the back of the glen, but it was the lowest down, so the detective chose the left hand drift first.



Ned lowered him down in the tub from which he could easily step off into the drift.

"Better wait till I have a look here!" he called out; "no use in two of us coming down till we know what there is ahead."

But Ned did not see it in that light at all.

"You go right on down, Dick," he exclaimed. "I won't hear of letting Zed do that job alone."

"You go," said Dick.

"Come, come, now! I won't have that! I can go down on the rope easily enough."

"So can I."

"And while we are quarreling about it Zed is alone in the drift."

"Hello, up there!" called the detective at that moment—"hello!"

"Hello!" answered Ned, leaning over the mouth of the shaft.

"There's nothing down here."

"What do you mean?"

"That the drift ends twenty feet in. Quite a show of gold there, too. I reckon that was the place where Mr. McCullagh did his best work."

"You are sure it ends? No hidden passage leading in?"

"If there is I can't find it. I guess we'll have to tackle the other drift, boys."

"All right. I'll let down the tub. We're coming right after you this time; don't you move a step until we have time to come down."

"I don't think I will," replied the Unknown, "for to tell the truth I expect to have trouble here. Thought I'd try the upper drift first, but the lower one leads off toward the rocks at the end of the glen, and there's no sort of doubt that's the one we want. Ah! Here's the tub! All aboard! Now, then, lower away."

In a moment the Unknown was in the other drift.

"Go on," said Dick.

"No; you go," said Ned.

"No use trying to make you give up your point, is here?" asked Dick. "Well, I suppose I've got to give in."

So Dick went down in the tub and joined the detective in the mouth of the drift.

Ned then hauled up the tub part way and throwing himself on the rope went flying down.

It was all he could do to swing in to the mouth of the drift, but by a great effort he managed it and the Unknown caught the rope, after which it was all right.

"This drift leads on indefinitely," said the detective.

"Then it's what we want," replied Ned; "but how do you know?"

"Looked ahead and found out."

"I see the light is out. Did you put it out, or did go out itself?"

"I put it out because I was afraid it would be seen. In fact is, Ned, I heard a noise on ahead there. It sounded like voices talking, but I couldn't be sure."

"Then we are on the right track, but we can't ad-

vance without a light; we shall break our necks if we try it."

"Let us go on a little way as still as we possibly can and listen. I want to locate those sounds."

They stole forward through the drift, feeling their way by the wall.

It was dangerous business, however, for there was every liability of falling into some hole.

"Careful! Careful!" said Ned. "I think we've gone as far as it's safe to go. Let's stop and listen for a moment or two."

This was done, and the result was most startling, for in a moment the sound of footsteps was heard ahead of them.

"Little Dan!" called a deep voice. "Hello! Is that you? Hello, little Dan!"

## CHAPTER X.

### PLOTTING IN THE DARK.

CAN anything be more startling than to have an enemy come suddenly upon you in the dark!

This was the experience Young Klondike and his friends had to go through with just then, for in spite of the fact that they were listening for these very sounds, it was most startling to hear that deep voice say "little Dan!" close in their ears.

Ned punched Dick as a warning for silence, and the Unknown at the same time gave Young Klondike a dig in the ribs.

And indeed they had need of silence for the newcomers were close upon them.

"Let them pass us," whispered the detective. "Let them pass us! It isn't safe for us to make a move."

So they remained perfectly motionless and let the unseen enemy come on.

"Something must have happened to the boy," a voice said. "Do you suppose they could have captured him? It would be strange if they had—quite a case of tit for tat! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Ned recognized the voice instantly. He knew that Doc was near him, and certainly the knowledge did not make him feel any the more secure.

It was Joe who answered.

"Blast it all," he said, "I don't know what can have got the boy. I made sure he'd follow us, and never gave him another thought. Can he have turned traitor, think?"

"Never! Little Dan is true blue. I'll back him against any boy in the world for keeping his mouth shut, if he don't want to speak."

"We'd better go on to the shaft and see. Perhaps we might try it on at the hut again, if we find that Dan has remained there on the watch and everything is all right?"

Try what on at the hut? What was the plan of these plotters who plotted in the dark?



Young Klondike and his companions held their breath as the two men walked past them. There was no chance to retreat; all they could do was to take chances of being run against in the dark.

If that happened then it meant fight, and very likely fight to the death.

Ned was all ready for instant action, and it is scarcely necessary to say that with Dick and the Unknown it was the same.

In a moment the men had passed on to the end of the drift.

They could hear the rope rattling, and knew that they were letting the tub down to the bottom of the shaft.

"They mean to climb up by the rope," breathed Ned. "I guess this is our chance to get on to the end of this place and see where these fellows came from."

They listened until they knew by the sounds that the two men had gone up to the level above.

"They'll find Dan at the house and he'll tell them all," said the detective; "boys, I'm afraid we are on the wrong side of the fence."

"Then let's make the most of our chance," said Ned. "Here, I'm going to light the lantern and go in."

He did so, taking all the risk without even one thought of fear.

Placing himself in the lead, Young Klondike pressed on through the drift, which here took a turn, and all in a moment found himself in a cave.

This was what he had expected. The cave was not a large one; the roof was low and on the rocky sides the icicles hung thick.

A faint light was visible ahead of them and, pressing toward it soon came out into the open, finding themselves in a large "sink" or inclosure, among the rocks.

They were now on the other side of the wall which formed the back of the glen over which the detective vainly attempted to pass.

Before them stood a hut and a dump, showing that a mine was being worked.

The place was a wonderfully secure retreat, and much of the mystery was now explained.

"You can see how it is for yourselves, boys," said the Unknown, as they stood there gazing around the sink. "These men probably worked for McCullagh. In some way they managed to discover this cave and probably struck a good claim in here, and worked it for their own advantage. I doubt very much if McCullagh knows that such a place exists."

And this shrewd guess of the Unknown's was the exact truth, as Young Klondike learned later on.

Just now there was no discussion about it. Ned was anxious to explore the place thoroughly before Doc and Joe returned.

"They'll hardly bring Dan with them," he said, "and he'll be sure to tell them of our questions, and that will send them flying back."

"Of course," said the detective. "We must dodge

them and get back ourselves. Fact is, Ned, we've found out just what we want to know and we can now understand why we were not attacked. These men never wanted to attack us; probably they've got a good thing here and all they care for was to be let alone."

"But the drugging?"

"They wanted that gold hidden under the floor, of course."

"Most likely. They were willing to leave us the Mastodon if we would leave them this place. Perhaps we will and perhaps we won't; that remains to be seen."

"Don't forget the third man," whispered the Unknown, as they neared the hut.

"Yes, and there may be a fourth and a fifth. I'm on the alert. Let's have a look at the shaft first."

"Have we got the time to spare?" questioned Dick. "They are liable to come back at any moment. I don't like the idea of being caught down here."

"Oh, you're anxious to get away," said the Unknown. "Take your time, boy, take your time."

It was all quiet enough now, and they hurried on to the shaft.

It seemed to be about twenty-five feet deep, and to have been very carefully constructed.

There was every facility for working it properly, and stamped upon all the mining tools lying scattered about was Mr. McCullagh's name.

"I'll bet you they are doing good business here," said the detective.

"Oh, I see it all as plain as day. These fellows struck into that cave by accident and went through to the sink. Finding gold they concealed it from their boss, and when the mine shut down they stayed behind to work for themselves. I don't doubt for an instant that they robbed Mr. McCullagh of these tools and every ounce of the provisions they are living on now."

"Let's get over to the hut and have a look," said Ned. "After we have taken it in, we'll start right back and lay for Doc and Joe."

"Do you mean to capture them if you can?" asked Dick.

"Well, no! I say let's give them the slip and go back to the Mastodon mine. We'll just mind our business for a little. Later on I'll go down to Dawson, see Mr. McCullagh, deliver him up the gold we've captured, tell him all about it, and then let him decide what to do."

This seemed a sensible plan enough, and Dick and the Unknown readily agreed to it, but things were not going to work out that way at all, as will presently be seen.

They now advanced to the hut which was a very substantially built affair, and seemed to be quite new.

A light was seen in the window, and peering in they perceived that it came from a fire burning upon the open hearth.



Two men sat beside the fire smoking and talking in the darkened room.

"If we could only hear what they are saying," mused Ned.

"I believe we can," answered the detective. "See, this door does not open directly into the room; there must be a little entry. I'm going in to see."

They could distinctly see the side door opening in the supposed entry into the room, by peering at the window. This is a common arrangement in Klondike country, and is designed to keep out the cold.

The Unknown now tried the outer door, and finding it open slipped inside, carefully closing it after him. Ned and Dick waited and watched.

The detective was gone a long time. Twice Ned opened the door and looked in.

Both times he saw the detective on his knees with his ear to the keyhole of the inner door. The first time he simply motioned Ned back, but the second he came up and came out.

Ned, for Heaven's sake let me alone a few moments," he whispered. "I tell you it's most important."

"They are plotting in the dark."

Thus saying the Unknown went back into the entry and closed the outer door.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CAPTURED.

"WHAT in the world do you suppose the Unknown has struck?" asked Dick, after the detective had returned inside.

"I'm blest if I'll ever tell you," replied Ned. "It must be something very important, though, or he would never act the way he does."

They waited most impatiently, and Ned was just coming to the conclusion that he would have to go and find the detective again, when all of a sudden there was a great commotion inside the hut.

Through the window they saw the two men suddenly spring to their feet and jerk the inner door open.

"Edith's discovered!" cried Ned, throwing open the inner door.

It was so!

Unobtrusively the detective had made some slight movement which attracted the attention of the two men.

There was a first-class fight on hand in an instant.

When Ned got the outer door open he found the detective struggling with four men instead of two, where there had been two others lying in the bunks.

The Unknown was fighting bravely, at the same time calling to the boys to help.

The sudden appearance of Young Klondike and Dick put an end to the fight, for the four men evidently sensing that there were others coming, made a dash for the bolt out of the back door of the hut and an in-

stant later were running across the snow toward the rocks, followed by shots from the rifles of Ned and Dick.

The boys could easily have killed them if they had wished to, but they had no such desire, of course. Their only idea was to frighten them away.

As they stood there at the back door they saw them make for the cave and disappear inside.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is great business!" cried the detective. "If those fellows had been armed, it would have been all up with yours truly. I never had such a scare in all my life."

"Weren't they armed?" asked Ned.

"Apparently not. If they had been I should have found it out. Ye gods and little fishes! I'm on the inside track in this business now!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Dick. "What have you found out, and what are we to do?"

"Do?" cried the Unknown. "Why, we are to stay right here! What have I found out? Lots! You'll open your eyes when I tell you! This is a most dastardly business! Most dastardly! Oh, I only hope that we are good for them! If not, I don't care to live."

The Unknown was terribly excited, that was easy to be seen.

"Cool down," said Ned. "Cool down now! Is there anybody else in this hut?"

"No, not as I know of, but there will be in a few moments—any time now, in fact, unless those fellows turn them back."

"Turn who back? What do you mean?"

"I mean lots—I mean that at any moment we are liable to see Edith here a prisoner! What do you say to that, boys? What do you say to that?"

The boys were dumfounded.

"What can you mean?" demanded Ned. "How can they capture Edith and bring her here?"

"How? By bribing two of our men to do the job."

"Ah! What two! But I need not ask; Cook and Jarvis played off sick the first of the week. They wandered down the gorge and were gone for hours."

"You've hit it; they met Doc whom they know very well and the bargain was made. Remember, dear boy, that all the men we are working on the Mastodon mine were working for McCullagh in this very place only a few weeks ago. Doc and Cook are old friends and were at one time partners. Do you see it now?"

"And you learned all this listening?" demanded Ned.

"Every word they said while they were plotting in the dark reached my ears. If I hadn't sneezed I might have heard more, but confound it all I did sneeze and you saw the result."

"What's to be done?" asked Dick. "Are we to follow them?"

"That's what we might do," replied the detective. "I propose to stay right here."

"And wait for them to come?"



"Yes."

"But think of Edith being dragged down into the drift. It will half kill the poor girl."

"No, it won't do anything of the sort. Trust Edith for standing up against it."

"But what's the scheme?" demanded Ned. "When do they mean to capture her?"

"To make you give up the gold we took out from under the floor, and also the nugget which that frozen man found at the mastodon."

"I see. The frozen man was one of this gang?"

"Certainly. He was little Dan's father. It was he who called for help that night, and we, in our ignorance, thought the cry came from the mysterious hut."

"I see, I see. And the horn was blowing to guide him in?"

"Exactly. Now you know it all. They have no desire to kill us, and they don't expect to drive us away. They want that gold and that's all. When they get it they mean to light out and leave us alone."

"Where did the gold come from, did you learn that?"

"Out of the mine right here."

"Dug without Mr. McCullagh knowing anything of its existence?"

"Not at all. McCullagh knows all about it. They struck through the drift and finding this place, which seemed to offer a good prospect started in to work it. Doc was made superintendent and Barnsley was his assistant. Together they managed to secrete this gold, taking it little by little and making false returns."

"Well, I must say you have listened to some advantage. Did those men go over all this ground?"

"Not entirely. I put this and that together and so managed to make out the whole story. You see Barnsley hid the gold under the floor of the hut, and at first after his death they did not know where to look for it. They sneaked back after McCullagh ordered the mine closed, and were doing well for themselves until this accident occurred. Finding that we were here, and likely to discover them, they determined to vacate, but did not do so until they found the gold. There, that's the whole story. Just why they drugged us I didn't learn, but I suppose they wanted to make sure of having time to pull up the floor undisturbed."

While the Unknown was going over the story of his discoveries, Young Klondike was thinking.

"I don't propose to stay here," he declared. "I don't think it will give us any better chance to lay for them and rescue Edith than if we went up through the shaft and met them in the glen or the other hut."

"All right," said the Unknown, quietly. "I don't agree with you, but you are boss, and whatever you say goes."

"Then we go."

"Back to the mysterious hut?"

"Yes."

"Amen! Off we go now, then, but prepare for

a fight. We are dead sure to have one. After what has occurred I have no doubt that it means war with the knife, and the next time we shoot at those fellows we've got to shoot to kill."

This ended the discussion, and they started back.

No one was encountered in the drift nor at the shaft.

When they went out into the glen the place seemed utterly deserted, and they saw nobody as they advanced toward the mysterious hut.

"They're either inside there or they've gone down to meet Cook and Jarvis and help bring Edith up," said the Unknown.

"We'd better go in and see," replied Ned. "I'm in no mood for nonsense just now."

Grasping his rifle firmly he laid hold of the latch and was about to open the door, when four men suddenly sprang upon them from around the corner of the hut and four revolvers were thrust in their faces.

"Surrender, Young Klondike!" was the first cry. "Surrender, or you are dead men!"

Even then Ned tried to unsling his rifle, but the four men, instead of firing or waiting for them to do so, sprang upon Young Klondike and his friends.

There was a brief struggle, which ended disastrously for Young Klondike's party.

They were all three captured at the door of the hut.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TABLES TURNED.

NEVER in all his life had Young Klondike felt more thoroughly discouraged than when he found himself lying bound on the floor of the hut between Dick and the Unknown.

It seemed to him that it was all his fault; that their capture had come about solely from not listening to the advice of the Unknown.

"Well, fellows, what do you think of it?" demanded one of their captors, as rough a specimen of a Klondike miner as Ned had ever laid eyes on. "You've put us unawares down there in the sink, but we were ready for you here, and I think you must admit that considering you had rifles and we only revolvers we did you up pretty slick. Ha, ha, ha! You have got your rifles now!"

"Look here, neighbor," said Ned. "I don't know you, but of course you know me well enough."

"Well, I reckon everybody knows Young Klondike," growled the man, who had been left to guard the prisoners while the other three went down the hill to meet Doc and Joe.

"Then you know that I am a man of my word. Now, I've got a proposition to make to you and——"

"Don't make it," growled the man. "Don't touch it. I won't hear to no proposition that makes no necessary for me to go back on my friends."



"That's business. I like you all the better for t."

"Then don't try to bribe me."

"I was only going to say that if you'd go along with the rest and leave us alone here I'll give you."

"No, you won't. I won't listen. I'm true to you."

"Ed gave it up. He hardly knew what to say for that."

"The case began to look pretty black. He did not have the idea of giving up the gold which rightfully belonged to Mr. McCullagh, but if it came to a question of saving Edith's life there was no other way."

"The miner now lighted his pipe and sat down to smoke by the fire."

"Little Dan, in the bunk, lay with his big eyes open."

"Through it all the boy had never said a word. Several times Ned had fixed his eyes upon him, but Dan always turned his head away, as much as he could."

"It's no use to look at me. I can't help you," but at the moment the man's back was turned, Dan had a look at the prisoners out of his big eyes and told altogether another story."

"Slowly he raised himself, noiselessly he threw his body over the edge of the bunk, his face all twisted with the pain the movement caused him."

"He watched him breathlessly."

"What is going to try and help us," breathed the Unknown, in his ear, "but he'll be discovered sure."

"But Dan did not mean to be discovered. The brave fellow was as quiet and stealthy as a cat."

"When his well foot struck the floor he sank down in a heap, for to stand was quite impossible."

"A little by little he dragged himself over the floor toward Ned."

"The boys held their breath as they watched him."

"When he was discovered then it was all up with Dan. He did not doubt that the guard would half kill the little chap in his rage."

"But Dan had no notion of being discovered. He edged over to Ned's side and drawing a keen knife, cut the cords around his hands and feet, and in passing over the knife edged away."

"All this time the miner sat there calmly smoking with his back turned."

"It seemed amazing that such a thing could be done, but it is just what Dan did."

"He did more—Dan was a wonderful boy, we all understood."

"There was a revolver sticking out of the guard's pocket. Dan edged over that way and little by little he came up behind the man."

"Ned and Dick watched him breathlessly. As for the Unknown, it was just all he could do to keep his anxiety so great."

"He put his hand on the revolver, and very gently he drew it out of the pocket."

The man never moved, nor did he stir when Dan drew back again and worked his way over to Ned, placing the revolver in his hands."

"To say that Young Klondike felt like giving one wild shout of triumph scarcely expresses it, but of course he restrained himself, for to have done that might still have ruined all."

"He looked over to see if Dick and the Unknown were free yet. As near as he could see without turning himself they were, and he was just about to make a move when a loud shout rang out upon the still night air."

"Doc and the boys at last!" cried the guard, springing up."

"He rushed to the door and flung it open, calling to his friends, who were coming up the path, and such was his haste that he never noticed little Dan upon the floor."

"I'll put the boy back in the bunk! Let's turn the tables on them suddenly," whispered the Unknown, as the guard ran on outside."

"To spring up and lift Dan was but the work of an instant."

"You shall be well paid for this, you brave little fellow!" breathed the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah you shall never regret what you have done this night."

"Don't let me go back to them, boss," whispered the boy. "You were good to me, let me stay with you."

"And so you shall if we escape," answered the detective, and he lay down again putting the cords over his hands and wrists, so as to make them look as natural as possible, although we must admit he did not succeed very well."

"Now for a quick move, boys!" he whispered. "You are all ready, Ned? How is it with you, Dick?"

"If we only had another revolver!" breathed Ned. "There are our rifles standing in the corner by the door, but if we were to try to get them I suppose it would give the snap away."

"There was no time to try—hardly time for the Unknown to whisper the glad news that he had a revolver concealed in a secret pocket when Doc came hurrying into the hut."

"Ah, ha! so we've got you at last, it seems, Young Klondike!" he exclaimed. "And we've got some one else, too! Give up that gold you took from the lower hut—give up poor Barnsley's nugget, or your friend, Edith Welton, will disappear off the face of the earth, and you will never lay eyes on her again."

"Is that the style of your talk?" replied Ned quietly. "Edith Welton is safe at the Mastodon mine, you can't bluff me that way."

"Can't, eh? Can't, eh?" chuckled Doc. "Look here!"

"At the same instant Edith entered the hut, and entered so suddenly that she seemed to have been pushed by some one from behind, which, indeed, was actually the case."



This and the sight of Ned and the others on the floor, prisoners as she supposed, seemed to move Edith, and all in an instant she seized one of the rifles which her sharp eyes spied in the corner, and raising it as quick as lightning covered Doc.

"Order them released, or I'll blow your brains out!" she cried. "Quick! Let those men advance. Another step and you die."

"Halt there! Hold on!" yelled Doc, in terror, and his terror was increased when Ned, Dick and the Unknown suddenly sprang to their feet.

"Hurrah for Edith!" shouted the detective. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, she's the bravest little woman on the Klondike, but thank goodness we don't need help!"

No, they did not need it.

Ned and the Unknown promptly discharged their revolvers at the men outside, while Dick seized one of the rifles from the corner and blazed away.

No damage was done, but the gang, hardly realizing what had happened, promptly stampeded and ran off up the glen.

"You get after them, and don't you dare to show your face again around any mine that I control," were Ned's words, which sent Doc flying after his friends.

It was a complete turning of the tables. Victory was won.

No more was seen of Doc and his gang, and it is to

be presumed that they retreated by way of the shaft into the sink.

Ned and the Unknown between them tenderly carried little Dan to the Mastodon mine, and on the way Edith related how she had been lured away from the house by Jarvis, who told a trumped-up story about Ned having fallen off the rocks and breaking his head.

Next morning Young Klondike led his entire gang into the sink with the intention of capturing Doc and his gang, but they had vanished and were not seen again.

Later on, the gold found under the floor of the house was delivered over to Mr. McCullagh, who was greatly surprised to get it, as may well be supposed, and he took charge of Dan, who was well rewarded by Ned and sent back to his friends in the States.

For the remainder of the winter Young Klondike continued to work his Mastodon mine.

Before spring nearly a million had been taken out, and yet the shaft was not exhausted by any means.

During his experience on the Klondike, Ned Gold made many famous strikes, but this under the mastodon's skeleton was the biggest strike of all.

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[THE END.]

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